

# Country Life in America

*as lived by Ten Presidents of the United States*

John Adams  
George Washington  
Thomas Jefferson  
Andrew Jackson  
Martin Van Buren  
William Henry Harrison  
James Buchanan  
Abraham Lincoln  
Theodore Roosevelt  
Calvin Coolidge

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By EDWARD TOWNSEND BOOTH

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FIRST EDITION

*I will sing of well-founded Earth, Mother of All, oldest of all beings; she feeds all creatures. . . . Through thee, O queen, men are blessed in their children and blessed in their harvests; and to thee it belongs to give means of life to mortal men and to take it away. Happy is the man whom thou delightest to honor; he hath all things in abundance.*

Homeric Hymn XXX. As translated in Moira,  
by William Chase Greene (1944)

*Les Anges, qui voient dans les idées créatrices tous les événements de cet univers, savent la philosophie de l'histoire; les philosophes ne peuvent pas la savoir. Car l'histoire elle-même n'est pas une science, puis q'elle ne porte que des faits individuels et contingents; elle est une mémoire et une expérience, dont il appartient aux Prudents d'user.*

by Jacques Maritain,  
*Trois Reformateurs* (1925)

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EDWARD TOWNSEND BOOTH



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## INTRODUCTION

It is a trite observation that the Adams family of Massachusetts vaulted into power from a small New England farm in one generation. Why so much should have been made of such a common occurrence, it is hard to say. Farmers' and peasants' and country storekeepers' and obscure country gentlemen's sons are ever becoming great poets, rich men, and statesmen. Certainly nothing is more usual in the early history of the United States than a president who was born and reared on a farm or a plantation with a long genealogy of American farmers in his background, leading back into an even longer one of English yeomen. The farmer's son, in America at least, has always had a wide gate welcoming him into the high places, from George Washington to Harry Truman.

The Adams family, to be sure, had not hitherto revealed the least gleam of the talent that suddenly kindled in John Adams and increased to such effulgence in his life and the lives of so many of his descendants. Their obscurity in England had been of that deepest kind that does not lighten even for a few lines in court records, church or leet, because of a stolen sheep, a drunken assault and battery, the attribution of a bastard, or a swift hanging. It is possible

to visualize their life in Somersetshire only in a composite picture of the lives of English yeomen in the days of Elizabeth and the early Stuarts. It is known that the immigrant Henry Adams was born five years before the Armada in Barton St. David, in the valley of the Brue, Somerset County, a hamlet on the low banks of a small winding stream in a pleasant, well-wooded, well-watered English countryside. A county historian of the late eighteenth century gazetted it forty houses and about two hundred inhabitants. It was little changed then, we may well believe, from the days when the immigrant Adams's father presumably worshipped in the small Gothic church where the son's birth was recorded. Not far from Barton St. David were the Somerset towns and villages of Taunton, Tiverton, Barrington, Shaftsbury, Wells, and Bath, whose names would emigrate to New England with the names and persons and hopes of so many yeomen and artisans of Somerset County.

Physiographically, Somersetshire was like the country to which so many of its place-names and surnames would be transplanted in the great Puritan migration. It was a maritime country, invaded by the tides of the Bristol Channel, great areas of it drowned in salt water or reclaimed from it in polders. Its coastal lowlands were backed by low hills that were replaced for the emigrants by the Blue Hills of Massachusetts — the marshy lowlands of Somerset by the numerous tidal flats of the Bay Colony. Like the people of the Bay Colony the folk of Somersetshire were more or less amphibious, making a living from the land and from the interlocked sea. From Bristol Somerset men had gone out for generations to fish in the region of John Cabot's discovery of Newfoundland. From Bristol hundreds of ships manned by native sailors and crowded with emigrant yeomen set sail for New England, their passengers prayerfully risking life and small prop-

erty in the North Atlantic crossing — humble English folk enacting the solemn prelude of a new civilization in the western world, in great hazard and with great hopes. But when they put to sea they were venturing on an element that Somerset men had braved for centuries — these graziers and farmers and artisans who had taken in salt air with their first breath.

Resemblance between Somersetshire and New England ended sharply on the westward voyage, where the isotherms sweep southward and the mild, even climate of Somersetshire — the summerland or *æstiva regio* of Celtic or Saxon days — changes to the rugged extremes of Maine and Massachusetts, with their sub-arctic winters and all but tropical summers. Somersetshire's kind and humid and fertile air and soil had been noted for their benevolence from time immemorial. The legendary island of Avilion, "where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns and bowery hollows crowned with summer sea," had long been claimed by Somerset — this *Ynys yr Afallon*, or mythical island of apples that suggests early idealization of a country of bland and equable climate and fine orchards. It was an English Arcadia where from the beginning of history great flocks of cattle and sheep pastured, and cider and perry and milk and honey flowed; and cheese and bread and ale and beef and mutton nourished a strong race of shepherds and farmers.

The Somerset farmers who uprooted themselves and their families and transplanted their fortunes to the thinner soil of Massachusetts, sailed south by the compass; but, in terms of climate, they removed to the most inclement regions of Scotland and the Hebrides. In terms of anthropology they retreated almost as far as the culture of the Somerset lake dwellers, remains of whose villages

show, nevertheless, that the sheep, the ox, the horse, the goat, the pig, the dog, and the hen had already been domesticated by them. The emigrating yeomen, who may have had as many as two thousand years of pastoral or agricultural life behind them in Somerset, would have to go back many centuries on their arrival in New England. They did not erect rude shelter on piles in glacial lakes of Massachusetts, but they lived for a time in the most primitive structures of slabs and wattles, hardly more comfortable in the depth of New England winter than the wigwams of savages from whom they would have to relearn many Stone Age skills. Like the Indians and the ancestral lake dwellers of Somerset they would have to supplement a maize-growing agriculture with hunting and fishing. The horse and the sheep and the goat and the pig and the hen would make the long and perilous crossing with them, but they would have to be closely guarded against the wolf and the bear and the wildcat (long vanished from the west of England). The Somerset sheep that had browsed so freely for ages in meadows and uplands, that were almost as much a part of the serene Somerset landscape as its hills and dales and pastures, would have to have vigilant care indeed on the ragged edge of the New England forest.

Curiously enough it was the sheep, meekest of all the domestic animals, that had been aggressively crowding men off the land since the middle of the fifteenth century in England, driving many of them into town poverty, vagrancy, vice, crime, the workhouse, and emigration. Actually sheep took the place of men, and their flocks the place of farm families, from the middle of the fifteenth century in the great enclosure movement – a movement at its height in Elizabethan times, and one that continued well into the eighteenth century. “Where there were a great many householders and inhabitants there is [sic]

now a shepherd and his dog," Hugh Latimer wrote in the sixteenth century. This radical change in English agriculture from tillage to grazing was slowing down toward the end of Elizabeth's reign when Henry Adams, the emigrant, was a young farmer and maltster at Barton St. David or in near-by Kingweston; but the great agrarian revolution of which it was one of the chief characteristics had had everything to do with unsettling the Somerset farmer's life. The generous profits in sheep, continued almost unbrokenly for nearly a hundred and fifty years, had weakened and broken the tenure of many small landholders like the Adamses. Means, direct and devious, had been found for dispossessing hundreds of families that had farmed the same small copyholds for generations. These holdings, which manorial custom had kept secure for centuries in many cases, were in the aggregate so valuable for grazing sheep that only the most stubborn and pugnacious and resourceful copyholders were able to retain them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Copyholders like the Adamses were tenants whose customary tenure was recorded in the ancient rolls of the manor. They had actually or figuratively a copy of this registration, stating the variable terms on which land was retained from generation to generation, according to the custom or tradition of the particular manor. They held their land, so to speak, because they *had* held it time out of mind, in return for specified services to the lord or for money payment. A freeholder's rights were specified and usually easily defensible, and were well-nigh inviolable in most cases; but it was an easy matter for the lord to arrange a forfeit of the vaguer, merely customary tenure of the copyholder. There is no known record of the dispossession of the Adams family of a copyhold they may have held for many generations. But they are known to have been copyholders, and it is quite probable that they were among the thousands who, in the agrarian revolution, suddenly found themselves divested of their land in favor of the sheep, or in favor of a new class of aggressive tenant farmers who were prepared to pay the competitive rackrents prevalent at this time. In any case, such insecurity of tenure made many an English copyholder look wistfully overseas to New England, where forty acres of freehold, more or less, could be had for the asking and occupancy, and even a small quitrent — one of the last vestiges of feudalism in the New World — was refused by the man who, by main strength, had hewed his farm out of the forest.

Such generalizations about the English emigrant yeoman doubtless cover the plight of the Adamses of Barton St. David and of Braintree, Massachusetts. These generalizations hold also for the yeoman background of most of the American presidents of English ancestry whose rural life is to be presented in this book. In the agrarian revolution — a radical change from production for use to production for money profit — many were unsusceptible to the new money stimulus. They soon lost property and place, sank in the social scale, or emigrated to America. The political revolutions and the religious experience of the times further complicated the economic changes, but fewer persons emigrated to America for purely political or religious reasons than it used to be generally supposed. If there is one point upon which virtually all historians of the American people are now agreed, it is that land hunger brought most men to North America in early colonial times.

Surely it was land hunger that brought John Adams's immigrant ancestor Henry to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Piety sustained him and his descendants in their hard struggle to make a living from free land in the wilderness. Good land tenure gave them security. On a modest freehold, in hard labor and deep obscurity, the Adamses developed in a few generations strong moral traits, and at last a strain of great talent, amounting at times to genius. In John Adams, second president of the United States, this talent suddenly springs up full grown in a Massachusetts furrow.



## I

### JOHN ADAMS: NEW ENGLAND FREEHOLD

“We had a very severe shock of an earthquake,” John Adams begins his diary in November 1755. “It continued near four minutes. I then was at my father’s in Braintree, and awoke out of my sleep in the midst of it. The house seemed to rock and reel and crack, as if it would fall in ruins about us.” But it did nothing of the sort. The old salt-box cottage, then in its ninety-fourth year—John Adams was in his twentieth—gave in its joints somewhat, no doubt; rattled its teeth; staggered a little, maybe. But after a few minutes of very rough handling in an earthquake that razed much of Lisbon and slew thirty thousand of its inhabitants, the great oak frame settled down on its sills none the worse for its severe shaking. Its windows and posts rattled again twenty years later during the Battle of Bunker Hill and the bombardment from Dorchester Heights. No doubt it had had a hard knocking about in the earthquake of February 10, 1697, recorded in the diary of John Marshall, a Braintree farmer and artisan, thirty-eight years before the birth of John Adams; but there it stands in Quincy today, solid as Quincy granite, and, alongside, hale and habitable, stands



a younger Massachusetts lean-to where John Quincy Adams was born in 1767. The environing Adams farms vanished long ago under a dreary industrial suburb, but these two farm cottages remain, humble monuments to a most remarkable fertility. For where in the United States is there another farm that can boast of having produced two presidents to the acre?

These Adams cottages seem to have strayed from the Old World, trailing a Gothic gloom into modernity, and yet offering a *Gemütlichkeit* that has vanished from a world devout in the religion of comfort and convenience. The men and women and children who, like the Adamses, lived in these close, dim interiors certainly did not live luxuriously or gaily. Their lives were without leisure or amenity. They were often dull with fatigue, numb with cold, racked with solicitude. Yet on this long trestle table before the great hearth in the lean-to kitchen the pewter and trenchers were piled high with excellent victuals. These long-legged, high-posted, valanced and canopied beds in the parlor and the bedchambers were nightly the repose of tired muscles in the days when husbands were husbandmen and wives were housewives and families were stable and prolific. The ceaseless care and labor of the farm made great draughts on human strength, but daily and nightly at table and abed this strength was generously renewed, and the new growth of the farm family sped along with it in joyful and robust procreation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The lean-to — under the long sloping roof that cut almost to the ground — testifies to this growth of the family. For, typically, the salt-box cottage began with only two rooms, upstairs and down, on one flank of a great chimney, often measuring twelve feet square at the base. As the family grew, this two-celled structure reproduced itself on the other flank of the huge chimney-stack, then threw out the shed-like roof at the back, beneath which a great, sooty kitchen extensively took the place of a smaller original one that had occupied for a time one of the front rooms on the first floor. Two small rooms under the lean-to, at either end of the kitchen, served respectively as a buttery (or pantry) and a sleeping-room for one of the farm children or the hired girl. Over the

These two Adams cottages of medieval design and atmosphere, so close to one another that their housewives might easily have gossiped out of the windows on a late June morning when the men and boys were getting in the hay, were known to the family as the Penn's Hill Cottages. With rail and stone fences they were teamed close to the old highway that joined Plymouth and Boston, facing it and backing toward the gentle, slight eminence of Penn's Hill. The older one, thought to have been built in 1661 because a brick bearing that date was found under the southeast corner of the house, was called Deacon John's Cottage, after the father of President John Adams. President John was born in this elder salt-box in 1735, and President John Quincy thirty-two years later in the younger cottage (probably built in 1716). The older cottage, then, is nearly three hundred years old and takes us back to the earliest days of American farming in New England. Of all presidential birthplaces in America it is the oldest now standing. Moreover, it closely links American farming with the late medieval agriculture of the Old World.

For the Adams cottages and their family life and farming continued in America a medieval pattern that was swiftly vanishing in England. So, in many ways, did the social life of their seventeenth-century Massachusetts. The feudal regimen was gone but the laborious self-sufficiency of the Middle Ages carried on in small villages and in these salt-box farmhouses with their long, brown, sloping roofs and hard angular fronts. "The men and women who dwelt in them were in great degree cut off from the

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lean-to, in the narrow second-story angle of the roof was the "black hole," so called, where the hired man slept amid seed-corn and lumber — the hired man, who one day, having learned all his farm skills, would become proprietor of a similar establishment.

An excellent professional description of the salt-box cottage, with many illustrations and architectural drawings, is contained in J. Frederick Kelly: *Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1927).

whole outer world. . . . The roads were few and bad. . . . So far as the whole great outer world was concerned, the earlier dwellers . . . were . . . entombed alive. . . . The men and women of those five generations were a poor, hard-working, sombre race, — rising early and working late, — laboriously earning their bread by the sweat of their brows. . . . The men worked in the fields, the women in the house: the first tended the flocks, or planted and gathered the harvest; — the last busied themselves in the dairy and the kitchen, or at the spinning-wheel and the wash-tub. It is a tradition of the daughter of Parson Smith [Abigail Adams] that with her own hands she scrubbed the floor of her bedroom the afternoon before her eldest son, John Quincy Adams, was born.”<sup>2</sup>

In near-by Weymouth, in John Adams’s infancy, the journal of the Reverend William Smith, father of Abigail Adams, pictures a life almost as narrow and rustic for the highest caste in such New England villages. Outside his ministry and beyond the Weymouth pastures and orchards that he tended with the aid of a casual and lazy Indian, this Harvard graduate seems to have had few social interests. His diary pictures a life concerned — aside from his church — with the grazing and breeding of cattle, and their slaughter, barter, shearing, and feeding; with milking, plowing, manuring, planting, and harvesting; with barn-building, epidemics, sudden death, and conflagrations. Once there is a carmine trace of some small scandal in a journal entry after a recent return from the fleshpots of Boston — the recording of a gloomy mood of repentance for unnamed peccadilloes. This sinful excitement, whatever it may have been, is unique among days upon days of rustic monotony.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Francis Adams: *Address at the 250th Anniversary of the Settlement of Weymouth* (Privately printed; 1874).

There is nothing in the Smith journal, in any case, to contradict the scholarly findings of Charles Francis Adams (1835–1915) that life in early Braintree was dull, hard, and fairly precarious. But if its purposes and activities were merely the primitive ones of gaining a small living and striving for a competence, there was evidently much talent latent in this narrow life, as the rise of great men and worthies from it sufficiently gives proof. Dull, plodding Braintree, out of its thin soil and poor social life, early produced at least two memorable Americans: John Adams, the deacon's boy, and John Hancock, son of a local minister. Abigail Adams, too, one of the most able women in American history, was born and reared in similar narrow circumstances in a near-by parsonage, where grafting apple trees and tending sheep and cows were gainful avocation for her father, the Reverend William Smith. The Quincy family, for whom Braintree was renamed years later, was identified with this same thin soil and belated medieval agriculture. The Quincys, much of the time, to be sure, moved in the highest circles of the little provincial capital of Boston, but they were nourished in more ways than one by their Braintree foothold. Farming there was an almost indispensable part of their living. Samuel Adams himself, the great demagogue and patriot who more than any other individual initiated a separate political life for Americans, was a Boston descendant of the English immigrant, Henry Adams. Samuel Adams's taproot, too, was in the original forty acres of Braintree freehold taken over in 1639 by the English copyholder. The family skill in brewing beer and ale had gone to Boston with his branch of the family and achieved something like affluence there.

As for John Adams, the future president, he seems to have exhibited to the naked eye of his fellow townsmen of Braintree no extraordinary qualities in childhood. Son

of a local cobbler and farmer and petty village official, he had had, to be sure, the advantage of a Harvard education in the humanities. Farming and the classics formed him in boyhood and youth, and prepared him for a great career. It was Pythagoras, no less, who seems to have suggested to him the keeping of a diary. John Adams quotes him in the first year of his journal:

*Let not sleep ever close thy tired eyes*

*Without asking thyself: What have I omitted and what done?*

*Abstain thou if 'tis evil; persevere if good.*<sup>3</sup>

John Adams's commonplace books contain many such extracts from Greek and Latin classics, evidence that he exposed himself freely in youth to the wisdom of antiquity, and sometimes to the lighter vein of classical literature, as when he read Ovid's *Art of Love* aloud to the pretty young wife of the local doctor. He varied amateur scholarship with flirtation and also with haymaking, ditch-digging, manure-spreading, and many other farm labors to which he had been inured almost from childhood. He drank a little wine now and again — sometimes too much — chewed and smoked tobacco a little, enjoyed dalliance with the village girls, even fell in love with one of them, coming out of this first youthful amour unattached and unscathed. He chided himself in his rural diary again and again for frivolity; but on the whole his life in Braintree, after his return from schoolteaching and law-reading in frontier Worcester, was one of sober self-improvement, hard manual labor, and strenuous intellectual exercise.

Returning from his apprenticeship to schoolteaching and the law in Worcester in October 1758, his diary re-

<sup>3</sup> *The Golden Verse of Pythagoras*, translated into French by Fabre d'Olivet: done into English by Nayan Louise Redfield. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons; 1917).

cords the novel feeling for nature of the mid-eighteenth century. The air of Worcester, he fancied, had not agreed with him. There he had been homesick for the sea that had never been far distant from his forefathers in maritime Massachusetts or from his ancestors in Somersetshire, England. "I panted for want of the breezes from the sea," he wrote retrospectively, "and the pure zephyrs from the rocky mountains of my native town." When winter came he feasted his eyes on the native fields and woods: "If I cast my eyes one way, I am entertained with the savage, unsightly appearance of naked woods and leafless forests. In another place a chain of broken and irregular mountains throws my mind into a pleasing kind of astonishment. But if I turn myself round, I perceive a wide, extensive tract before me made up of woods and meadows, wandering streams and barren plains, covered in various places by herds of grazing cattle and terminated by the distant view of the town."

Content to breath October air on his own grounds, he began to study Justinian's *Institutions* with notes, borrowed from the Harvard College Library. "Let me, therefore distinguish myself . . . by the study of the civil law in its native languages, those of Greece and Rome," he adjured himself. "On a Sunday I will read the Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul, and for amusement, I will sometimes read Ovid's Art of Love to Mrs. Savil. This shall be my method." Certainly a well-balanced program, with an additional counterpoise to metaphysics in his sometimes rising at daybreak to pitch a load of hay. He records that the greater part of one day was spent in unloading a cart, cutting oven wood, in making and replenishing his own fire, in eating victuals and apples, in drinking tea, cutting and smoking tobacco, and in chatting with Dr. Savil's wife. Chores, chat, tobacco, tea all stole away time, but he hewed to the line of Justinian and

also Gilbert's *Feudal Tenures*, none the less, day after day, week after week in his rural semi-seclusion. He studied such appropriate cases as: "Lambert's horse broke into Field's inclosure and lay there some time, *damage feasant*."

In due course came a case of his own, undertaken for "the relief of distressed poverty; the defense of innocence and justice against oppression," as he puts it. He defended an action for an old horse versus Samuel Spear, lost the case, railed against his own inexpertness and the guile of deputy sheriffs, pettifoggers, and constables. In a mood of disillusion and self-accusation he let Virtue address him on the subject of horses, but in another sense: "Take my advice"; Virtue counseled him, "rise and mount your horse by the morning's dawn, and shake away, amidst the great and beautiful scenes of nature that appear at that time of day, all the crudities that are left in your stomach, and all the obstructions that are left in your brains. Then return to your studies, and bend your whole soul to the institutes of the law. . . . Let no trifling diversion, or amusement, or company, decoy you from your book; that is, let no girl, no gun, no cards, no flutes, no violins, no dress, no tobacco, no laziness, decoy you from your books."

"I am too lazy," he deplores, "to rise early and make a fire; and when my fire is made, at ten o'clock my passion for knowledge, fame, fortune, for any good, is too languid to make me apply with spirit to my books, and by reason of my inattention my mind is liable to be called off from law by a girl, a pipe, a poem, a love-letter."

In short, at twenty-three John Adams is not quite the prig that many of his diary entries suggest. It is ambition and the love of pleasure, a strong team, that are pulling one way and another within him; and he is subduing both

to steady hauling under a strong will; breaking in native forces that will carry him far from rural Braintree. He will drive his team one day in Boston, Philadelphia — yes, in Paris and London and The Hague — before the carping and admiring political leaders of the world at home and abroad. These great men of the eighteenth century and of antiquity whose work he reads in his rural quiet — John Adams, the farmer's son, will take his place in history with the best of them. He will achieve fame, power, and wisdom.

But "What am I doing?" he groans in his journal. "Shall I sleep away my whole seventy years? no, by everything I swear I will renounce this contemplative, and betake myself to an active, roving life by sea or land, or else I will attempt some uncommon, unexpected enterprise in law; let me lay the plan, and arouse spirit enough to push boldly . . . but I will not forego the pleasure of ranging the woods, climbing cliffs, walking in fields, meadows, by rivers, lakes, &c, and confine myself to a chamber for nothing. I'll have some boon in return, exchange; fame, fortune or something."

Boston, on his frequent visits, is as distracting as the beauties of nature and of the young girls of Braintree: "Who can study in Boston streets? I am unable to observe the various objects that I meet, with sufficient precision. My eyes are so diverted with chimney-sweepers, sawyers of wood, merchants, ladies, priests, carts, horses, oxen, coaches, market-men and women, soldiers, sailors; and my ears with the rattle-gabble of them all, that I cannot think long enough in the street, upon any one thing, to start and pursue a thought. I cannot raise my mind above this mob crowd [sic] of men, women, beasts, and carriages, to think steadily. My attention is solicited every moment by some new object of sight, or some new sound.



A coach, cart, a lady, or a priest, may at any time, by breaking a couplet, disconcert a whole page of excellent thoughts."

Returned to Braintree, the young man writes: "The road is walled on each side with a grove of trees. The stillness, silence, and the uniformity of the prospect, put the mind into a stirring, thoughtful mood.

"But the reflections that are made in a grove are forgotten in the town; and the man who resembles a saint in his thoughts in the first, shall resemble a devil, in his actions in the last.

"In such silent scenes as riding or walking through the woods, or sitting alone in my chamber, or lying awake in my bed, my thoughts commonly run upon knowledge, virtue, books &c; though I am apt to forget these in the distracting bustle of the town, and ceremonious converse with mankind."

In his rural study at twenty-three John Adams could not always keep his mind on virtue, knowledge, books. His thoughts, as he puts it, roved from girls to friends, and from friends to court, to Worcester, to Newburyport, and thence to ancient Greece and Rome, then to the law. "Could I fix my attention, and keep off every fluttering thought that attempts to intrude upon the present subject, I could read a book all day." He observed also that "retirement will lose its charms if it is not interrupted by business and activity. I must converse and deal with mankind, and move and stir from one scene of action and debate and business and pleasure and conversation to another, and grow weary of all, before I shall feel the strong desire of retiring to contemplation on men and business and pleasure and books."

"After hard labor at husbandry," he goes on to say, "reading and reflection in retirement will be a relief and a high, refined pleasure; after attending a town meeting,

watching the intrigues, arts, passions, speeches that pass there, a retreat to reflect, compare, distinguish, will be highly delightful."

In his rustic prelude to a world career John Adams was learning to know the people and their practical politics. "Is it not absurd," he asks himself, "to study all arts but that of living in the world, and all sciences but that of mankind? . . . You may get more by studying town meeting . . . than you can by studying Justinian and all his . . . heavy commentators.

"Mix with the crowd in a tavern, in the meeting-house . . . and grow popular by your agreeable assistance in the tittle-tattle of the hour; never think of the deep, hidden principles of natural, civil, or common law, for thoughts like these will give you a gloomy countenance and a stiff behavior.

"I should talk with T——, L——, C——, &c &c about changing horses. Offer to change or sell, trade in anything."

Where indeed could he have found a better elementary school of practical politics than the tavern and the town meeting of his native village? Where better practice in the chief skill of business and politics — shrewd, hard bargaining — than in local political intrigue and in horse-trading?

He did not have to feign interest when he talked farming with prospective clients and constituents. If a man boasted of seventy bushels of potatoes to the acre, he was sincerely impressed. Nor did he have to work up an interest in timber or fruit trees or the possibility of growing Rhenish grapes — vain hope — in Norfolk County. He did not have to simulate enthusiasm over the prospect of introducing lucern (alfalfa) to Braintree pastures. After the long, assiduous apprenticeship of youth and early manhood, politics would fill his life to overflowing

in its ripe middle years; but books, ideas, and husbandry would go the whole way with him from youth to old age in a deep mainstream.

"My thoughts have taken a sudden turn to husbandry," he confides to his journal in his twenty-seventh year. "Have contracted with Jo. Field to clear my swamp, and to build me a long string of stone wall, and with Isaac to build me sixteen rods more. . . . And my thoughts are running continually from the orchard to the pasture, and from thence to the swamp, and thence to the house and barn and land adjoining. Sometimes I am at the orchard ploughing up acre after acre, planting, pruning apple-trees, mending fences, carting dung; sometimes in the pasture, digging stones, clearing bushes, pruning trees, building wall to redeem posts and rails; and sometimes removing button trees down to my house; sometimes I am at the old swamp, burning bushes, digging stumps and roots, cutting ditches across the meadows and against my uncle; and am sometimes at the other end of town buying posts and rails to fence against my uncle, and against the brook; and am sometimes ploughing the upland with six yoke of oxen, and planting corn, potatoes, &c, and digging up the meadows and sowing onions, planting cabbages, &c &c. Sometimes I am at the homestead, running cross fences, and planting potatoes by the acre, and corn by the two acres, and running a ditch along the line between me and Field, and a fence along the brook against my brother, and another ditch in the middle from Field's line to the meadows. Sometimes am carting gravel from the neighboring hills, and sometimes dust from the streets upon the fresh meadows, and am sometimes ploughing, sometimes digging those meadows to introduce clover and other English grasses."

Three things there were that easily focussed the young man's being — the pursuit of knowledge; the expression of

his unfolding thought and feeling in excellent eighteenth century prose; <sup>4</sup> and, third but not least, the charms of pretty girls. Their faces and their graces invaded his imagination in his rural study and often drew him out of it to gallivant in Braintree parlors. It was a fatal day for him when he found at last a pretty face which had also unusual intelligence and spirit and charm shining forth from it. His diary, with all its green sagacity and petulant self-accusation and high plans for self-improvement and for getting on in the world, ceases for the years 1763 and 1764. It was in the latter year that he became engaged to Abigail Smith, daughter of the Reverend William Smith, whom we have seen pruning his orchard and tending his

<sup>4</sup> In this rustic novitiate to law, politics, and worldly wisdom, John Adams discovered a way to focus the mind that almost never failed: prose composition. Gilbert Chinard, scholarly and philosophical biographer of John Adams (*Honest John Adams*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1933) says so truly that "in another land, in other times, Adams would have become a writer and found in producing literature the means of self-expression for which he always yearned." He would have made a name for himself thus in London or Paris, Chinard believes. No one who has read John Adams's unofficial, informal, intimate writing in journals and personal correspondence can doubt this. He was a born writer and a talented one. From early manhood to the last days of his life he almost daily had pen in hand, delivering himself of his ideas and sentiments vivaciously, pungently, and with intense energy. The correspondence of his old age with Thomas Jefferson rivals Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* both in style and content. It is an American classic that ranks with the epistolary classics of all time. In youth his diary shows his mind in its earliest spring, its foliation and bloom as charming and fresh as the apple orchards of Braintree late in May. He can be seen here swiftly learning the fine art of writing, daily gaining in grace and energy and ease, divesting himself of the fashionable mannerisms and affectations of the day. At twenty-four, John Adams could concentrate on writing as on nothing else. "Writing is one of the greatest pleasures," he notes in his diary for 1760, "and it sooner rouses my ambition, warms my imagination, and fixes me in a train of thinking, than any other thing that I can do. . . . The more I write the better. Writing is a most useful, improving exercise. Yesterday morning, before breakfast, I wrought my mind into a course of thinking by my pen, which I should not have fallen into the whole day without it; and, indeed, not resuming my pen after breakfast, I insensibly lost my attention. Let me aim at perspicuity and correctness, more than ornament, in these papers."

sheep in Weymouth. Perhaps young Adams's diary for these years was too full of the emotional outpourings of courtship to be preserved? Perhaps it ceased because his youthful egoism had given birth to true love and the grown man? In any case, when he presently married Abigail Smith, John Adams took a partner ideally suited to a career which would soon be leading him away from all self-pondering into the thick of life — a woman of great courage and energy and versatile ability, who was also a good wife to a good husband all the years of her long life.

John and Abigail Adams settled down to housewifery and husbandry on the small freehold where John Adams's father and forefathers had gained a living from the land for generations. Many of the Adamses, even from the English origins, appear to have been maltsters or brewers as well as farmers. The habit of having a second string to the bow of husbandry was an old one in such families. With John Adams, farming was the second string to the law. But his whole life long he derived much of his living directly from the farming — for many years from the paternal and ancestral acres. The Penn's Hill farms gave John Adams in his youth cash crops and sustenance and an opportunity to live modestly yet with dignity on the land. As he became known in the Province of Massachusetts, his law practice and political prestige increased very rapidly. In a less disturbed society, there is not the slightest doubt he would have soon arrived at wealth and position, and his farm and his farming would have become merely a favorite avocation. But in the uneasy years — almost ten of them — that ended in the American Revolution, and many a time during the Revolution, this Braintree arable, pasture, and woodlot was bread and butter and warmth in winter, as well as the quiet and solace his excitable temperament demanded. The farm under Penn's Hill also gave him frequent opportunities

for study and reflection, importunate needs of his throughout adult years.

"I find that idleness lies between business and study," he wrote shortly after his domestic life began on the farm. "That is, the transition from the hurry of a multiplicity of business to the tranquillity that is necessary for intense study, is not easy. There must be a vacation, an interval between them, for the mind to recollect itself." He calmed nerves sorely irritated in Boston law courts, by driving cattle to water, or surveying his lowlands for drainage, or thinning his woodlot. At the farm he endeavored to take his moral latitude and longitude and made examination of his conscience in good New England style: "To what objects are my views directed? What is the end and purpose of my studies, journeys, labors of all kinds, of body and mind, of tongue and pen? . . . In truth, I am tossed about so much from post to pillar, that I have not leisure and tranquillity enough to consider distinctly my own views, objects, and feelings. . . . I am certain, however, that the course I pursue, will neither lead me to fame, fortune, power, nor to the service of my friends, clients, or country. What plan of reading, or reflection, or business, can be pursued by a man who is now at Pownalborough, then at Martha's Vineyard, next at Boston, then at Taunton, presently at Barnstable, then at Concord, now at Salem, then at Cambridge, and afterwards at Worcester? Now at Sessions, then at Pleas, now in Admiralty, now at Superior Court, then in the gallery of the House? What a dissipation this must be! Is it possible to pursue a regular train of thinking in this desultory life? By no means. It is a life of . . . *'here and everywhere,'* — a rambling, roving, vagrant, vagabond life; a wandering life."

A residence in Boston saved him much travel. After four years of the farm and of riding circuit he moved there, and his wanderings were reduced by at least the twelve

miles of daily "commutation" between Braintree and the provincial capital. But before the house in Brattle Square where he took up his town residence a British regiment drilled. The whole city was fermenting with threats of civil war. A visit to Norton Quincy's home in Braintree made dramatic contrast to this turmoil and menace. "Here is solitude and retirement," he said. "Still, calm, and serene, cool, tranquil, and peaceful, — the cell of a hermit; out at one window you see Mount Wollaston, the first seat of our ancestors, and beyond that, Stony Field Hill [future site of the Adams mansion], covered over with corn and fruits; out at the other window, an orchard, and, beyond that, the large marsh called the broad meadows; from the east window of the opposite chamber, you see a fine plain covered with corn, and beyond that the whole harbor and all the islands; from the end window of the east chamber, you may see with a prospect-glass every ship, sloop, schooner, and brigantine, that comes in or goes out."

At this time John Adams complacently noted in his diary that he had more business at the bar than any other lawyer in the Province. But his health was failing under the strain of it and of the violent political excitements of the long curtain-raiser to the Revolution. After nearly three years of Boston and the circuit court, he returned to the farm. "The complicated cares of my legal and political engagements, the slender diet to which I was obliged to confine myself, the air of the town of Boston, which was not favorable to me, who had been born and passed almost all my life in the country, but especially the constant obligation to speak in public, almost every day for many hours, had exhausted my health . . . and compelled me to throw off a great part of the load of business, both public and private, and return to my farm. . . . The air of my native spot, and the fine breezes from the

sea on one side, and the rocky mountains of pine and savin on the other, together with daily rides on horseback and the amusements of agriculture, always delightful to me, soon restored my health in a considerable degree."

The nervous, exclamatory tone of his journal in town changes to one of quiet self-congratulation on having based himself again in "still, calm, happy Braintree," where he surveyed the work of hired men, drank early tea with his wife, walked up Penn's Hill or down into the meadows, or rambled over the western common of Braintree, whence Boston could be viewed distantly in the bright New England air. "I felt a joy, I enjoyed a pleasure, in revisiting my old haunts, and recollecting my old meditations, among the rocks and trees, which was very intense indeed."

"From Saturday to Wednesday morning," he noted later in this year of his return from Boston to his farm, "I staid at Braintree, and rode, walked, rambled, and roamed. Enjoyed a serenity and satisfaction to which I have been three years a stranger." Again, in his diary for 1771: "My mind has been running chiefly upon my farm and its inhabitants and furniture, my horses, oxen, cows, swine, walls, fences, &c. I have, in several late rambles, very particularly traced and pursued every swamp and spring upon the north side of Penn's hill, from its source to its outlet; and I think if I owned the whole of that side of the hill, I could make great improvements upon it by means of springs, and descents, and falls of water."

The young legal practitioner and politician had been burning his candle at both ends for many years, in his public life and the social duties that were a part of it. But the recreation that he seldom found in formal social gatherings he enjoyed in good therapeutic measure on his farm. There was still so much of the puritan yeoman in John Adams that dancing, cards, backgammon, and small



talk inspired by madeira and flip were distasteful, even repugnant to him. He was apt to carry his burden of legal and political problems and the emotional intensity that went with them into the parlor. The problems of the farm he took more lightly because they were not the main issue and, perhaps, because his people for many generations had dealt with them daily and mastered them. This family vocation was becoming avocation. But at many times in his life his skill at farming and his love of it gave him firm economic footing, or a springboard from which to vault to higher ground. Notably his farming enabled him to refuse advancement of any kind that threatened his integrity or his tastes and bent. He could, because of it, eschew the political support of the royalists who had taken the measure of his abilities and were angling for them. Many years later the farm cushioned his fall from power. In the first ten years of his married life, when his new family responsibilities and the swift growth of his political prestige took overdrafts on his energies, his little farm under Penn's Hill contributed importantly to his support and relaxed and renewed him. At the end of this decade when he was called upon to take a major part in the founding of the United States, at a money compensation hardly greater than a farm laborer's, this land which he had inherited and improved and for many years added to with his savings kept his wife and children from want. Fortunately, too, he had chosen the right wife. Abigail Adams was a woman of great energy, character, and executive ability. In the succeeding ten years — not single-handed certainly, for she had men and women to do much of the manual labor of the farm and the household, but single-headed, so to speak — she fed, clothed, and sheltered herself and at times four small children on the Penn's Hill acres. When John Adams left for the first session of the Continental Congress Abigail Adams found

herself farm manager of a tract of one hundred and forty acres of no extraordinary fertility. She had hardly taken over her responsibility before war broke out, not distantly, but well within earshot and in plain view, if she climbed Penn's Hill and looked upon its smoke and flames — as indeed she did more than once.

The news of Concord and Lexington came to this young woman shortly before her husband left a second time for the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. An enemy foraging party raided the Fore River in the quiet of a Sunday morning one month later. American militia camped in the Adams farmyard and put seven-year-old John Quincy Adams through the manual of arms. The small boy and his mother climbed Penn's Hill to view the battle of Breed's and Bunker Hill. Pewter was run into bullets on the farm hearth and wounds were dressed there. Artillery arrived from Crown Point and Ticonderoga and thundered away on Dorchester Heights near by, shaking the farm cottages to their sills. Refugees begged for shelter and found it in these two small houses.

Two years before these scenes of the Revolution at Penn's Hill John Adams had foreseen such sacrifices. Retrospectively, years later, he wrote: "I had a wife — and what a wife! I had children — and what children! I was determined never to accept any office, place, or employment, from the government of Great Britain or its representatives, governors in America. On the other hand, I knew here [sic] was nothing for me to depend on but popular breath, which I knew to be as variable as any one of the thirty-two points of the compass.

"In this situation I should have thought myself the happiest man in the world, if I could have retired to my little hut and forty acres, which my father left me in Braintree, and lived on potatoes and sea-weed for the rest of my life. But I had taken a part, I had adopted a system, I had en-

couraged my fellow-citizens, and I could not abandon them in conscience nor in honor."

The *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife* — another epistolary classic of American literature — begins and ends with Abigail Adams on the Braintree farm and John Adams looking toward it as a refuge from impending civil war or as a happy retreat after ten years of revolution and political emergency. "We live, my dear soul, in an age of trial. What will be the consequences, I know not," he wrote his wife from Boston in the spring of 1774. "Let me know what is best for us to do. It is expensive keeping a family here, and there is no prospect of any business in my way in this town this whole summer. I dont receive a shilling a week. We must contrive as many ways as we can to save expenses."

From the eastern circuit he wrote gloomily in the same vein: "I was first sworn in 1758. My life has been a continual scene of fatigue, vexation, labor, and anxiety. I have four children. I had a pretty estate from my father; I have been assisted by your father; I have done the greatest business in the province; I have had the very richest clients in the province. Yet I am poor in comparison with others. . . . Every lawyer who has the least appearance of abilities makes it do in the country. In town, nobody does, or ever can, who either is not obstinately determined never to have any connection with politics, or does not engage on the side of the Government, the Administration, and the Court. . . . Let us, therefore, my dear partner . . . apply ourselves, by every way we can, to the cultivation of our farm."

In other letters from the eastern circuit this fateful spring and summer of 1774 he regretted not being on the farm in the finest weather of the year, especially so with legal activity so slackened and compensation so slight. He wrote almost daily from York, the pen still his best

remedy for nervousness and distraction. "I am so idle that I have not had an easy moment without my pen in my hand. My time might have been improved to some purpose in mowing grass, raking hay, or hoeing corn, weeding carrots, picking or shelling pease. . . . I sometimes think I must come to this — to be the foreman upon my own farm and the schoolmaster to my own children. . . . I pray God for your health — entreat you to rouse your whole attention to the family, the stock, the farm, the dairy."

From Falmouth he wrote: "It is a great mortification to me that I could not attend every step of their progress in mowing, making [sic] and carting. I long to see what burden. But I long more to see to the procuring more seaweed, and muscle mud and sand, etc. However, my prospect is interrupted again. I shall have no time. I must prepare for a journey to Philadelphia, a long journey indeed!" he exclaimed, but certainly with no prophetic vision of Paris, London, and The Hague, nor of the long post-war years in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington.

As John Adams rode to the Continental Congress over dusty roads, there was a drought on his farm. Then there was a charming rain lasting twelve hours which revived the crops. His wife's account of the rain refreshed the husband, who hoped that their husbandry was being prudently managed by the housewife. "Frugality must be our support," he wrote from Princeton, New Jersey. "Our expenses in this journey will be very great. Our only [recompense will be] the consolatory reflection that we toil, spend our time, and [encounter?] dangers for the public good." The cows had suffered from the long August drought and forwarded meek complaint to the master. Young John Quincy read a page or two a day from Rollins's *Ancient History* to his mother. Militia marched past,

transporting gunpowder farther into the interior. When they asked Abigail Adams if she would like to have some, she said, thank you, no; not as long as it was in such good hands! They were mounting cannon on Beacon Hill, digging trenches on the Neck, placing cannon there, and encamping a regiment of British troops.

"I am anxious to know how you can live without government," John Adams wrote from the midst of a new one in the making in the Hall of the Company of Carpenters in Philadelphia. "But the experiment must be tried. The evils will not be found so dreadful as you apprehend them. Frugality, my dear, frugality, economy, parsimony, must be our refuge. . . . Let us eat potatoes and drink water; let us wear canvas, and undressed sheepskins, rather than submit to the unrighteous and ignominious domination that is prepared for us." Tell the hired man to quit drinking so much rum, he ended his admonitions.

British raiders came for Braintree hay — three hundred of them. They were driven off an island in the bay by two thousand farmers who sprang up from nowhere in no time. The American militia and Boston refugees consumed Adams food and provender; soldiers came in for a lodging, for breakfast, for supper, for drink; refugees spent a day, a night, sometimes a week at the expense of the Adams larder. Abigail Adams and her brood of four lived in the newer of the two cottages. The absent John Adams's clerks were installed with many of his law books in the old kitchen. The older cottage, Deacon John's, housed farm hands, refugees, and a dairy. How many mouths were there to feed from the produce of one hundred and forty acres, forty of them wood lot? Not less than eight at any time is a fair estimate, perhaps. With so many troops in the barnyard and refugees in Deacon John's cottage, it is a wonder that Abigail Adams was not eaten

out of house and home. There were many farm animals, as well as tired and famished soldiers and refugees, to feed through the winter. The farm kept some resemblance to domestic peace and comfort while battle and sudden death arrived on the other side of the hill — an ironical semblance. But here, actually, were warmth and kindness and food and shelter and an inspiring view of a brave woman and her children, who did what they could for the troops with cheerful alacrity.

"You can hardly imagine how we live," Abigail wrote John Adams a few weeks after Concord and Lexington (whence he had escaped the famous British raid by the skin of his teeth, to go on risking his life and sacred honor as revolutionary conspirator in Philadelphia). The husband ceased to particularize on frugality and parsimony. War, as usual, enforced them on all but the rich, in the usual ways. There was little danger of being lavish with such short rations, which, while they lasted, belonged to empty stomachs that asked for them. Man's inhumanity to man did not go as far as a refusal to feed the hungry or to bind up wounds. The self-sustaining homestead which the canny John Adams had maintained with his left hand while his right had received large legal fees from the richest men in the province — this medievalish institution was very much in style again for the moment. It was even the rage, you might say, with well-to-do merchants and professional men who were able to escape Boston and beg for bed and board on the Adams farm. But the house was becoming a hospital for the sick as well as the wounded. An acute and often fatal dysentery began to rival Bunker Hill casualties. Abigail Adams's valor was equal to the plague also. She, her children, her hired men and girls were seriously ill with it. Her mother, John Adams's brother, and Betty, a hired girl, died in the afflicted summer and early autumn of 1775. Shaky convalescents

crawled out of bed to feed and water the stock or to attend the sick and the dying.

War and plague did their worst in the Province of Massachusetts, but famine, threatening Boston, kept its distance from the Braintree farm. Feed, fodder, and firewood were for sale at prices that only the rich could pay. For a time meat was cheap and plentiful as farmers slaughtered animals they could not feed through the winter. The slaughter of men subsided only to begin again recklessly enough in the spring. Abigail Adams heard the cannon tune up again back of Penn's Hill. It had a ghastly grandeur, this battle symphony, as Washington opened up with siege artillery on Dorchester Heights a few miles away. "The sound, I think, is one of the grandest in nature, and is of the true species of the sublime," Abigail Adams gave the devil and hell their due. War indulges in no caterwauling. It roars magnificently, like a lion. Even as one's dear countrymen fell, this awful clamor, this man-made thunder and lightning had a portentous beauty. Its costs in wounds and death, moreover, was slight reckoned with the victory. Sixteen thousand embattled farmers generaled by a Virginia planter soon saw the greatest British fleet ever assembled in North America sail out of Boston Harbor, packed with soldiers and sailors and loyalist refugees. The farmer-politician's wife saw these ships make ready to sail, saw them driven away by an army of "peasants" (as the British called them) — but peasants with a difference, peasants who owned their land in fee simple, these American yokels. No lord, no king, they thought, had a better tenure or one more worth fighting for. Was not this the first time that Europeans indulged in the fallacious belief that Americans could not or would not fight for their rights, that they could hardly improvise a defense, undisciplined individualists that they were, most hopeless individualists of all — self-sustaining

farmers? But only eight miles or so from the Adams farm a Virginia squire had improvised an offensive that sent the British winging away in their beautiful ships like a great flock of gulls flushed in the Bay.

The self-sustaining freehold not only harbored a fighting heart but fed its men and its animals — combatant and non-combatant — for nearly seven years of civil war. The superfluities and luxuries of household economy, few in those days, were scarce or wanting altogether at times. "Every article in the West India way is very scarce and dear. In six weeks we shall not be able to purchase any article of the kind," Abigail Adams wrote her husband, July 16, 1775. "You can hardly imagine how much we want many common small articles, which are not manufactured amongst ourselves; but we will have them in time; not one pin to be purchased for love or money. I wish you would convey me a thousand by any friend travelling this way. It is very provoking to have such a plenty so near us, but Tantaluslike, not to be able to touch. I should have been glad to have laid in a small stock of the West India articles, but I cannot get one copper; no person thinks of paying anything, and I do not choose to run in debt. I endeavor to live in the most frugal manner possible, but I am many times distressed." Corn rose to four shillings a bushel; rye to five; oats to three and eight pence. Hay already cost six shillings a hundredweight. Wood was twenty shillings a cord as the war entered its first year.

When the British fleet sailed away in the spring of 1776 Massachusetts farmers, Abigail Adams among them, rejoiced to plant crops which they, not the enemy, would harvest. "I feel very differently at the approach of spring from what I did a month ago. We knew not then whether we could plant or sow with safety, whether where we had tilled we could reap the fruits of our own industry,



whether we could rest in our own cottages or whether we should be driven from the seacoast to seek shelter in the wilderness; but now we feel a temporary peace, and the poor fugitives are returning to their deserted habitations. . . . I long to hear that you have declared an independency," Mrs. Adams wrote from the precarious independency of a freehold defended by freeholders — by hard-bitten farmers who sprang from New England furrows to aim coolly and straight with muskets and smooth-bore artillery, and who could stand being shot at by the superior arms of troops mustered in a measure from landless Englishmen. Something of the local granite had entered their souls. You could not blast them loose from their free tenure with many barrels of gunpowder much superior to their own (that was mixed with saltpeter scraped from barn floors).

Independence for a people or a farm, though, comes at a price. "I miss my partner," Abigail Adams wrote, "and find myself unequal to the cares which fall upon me. I find it necessary to be the directress of our husbandry. I hope in time to have the reputation of being as good a *farmeress* as my partner has of being a good statesman. . . . Retirement, rural quiet, domestic pleasures, all, all must give place to the weighty cares of state." If neither husband nor wife felt quite equal to their cares, both met them so well that more cares were added unto them.

"Instead of domestic felicity, I am destined to public contentions. Instead of rural felicity, I must reconcile myself to the smoke and noise of a city. In the place of private peace, I must be distracted with the vexation of developing the deep intrigues of politicians, and must assist in conducting the arduous operations of war, and think myself well rewarded if my private pleasure and interests are sacrificed, as they ever have been and will be, to the happiness of others," John Adams responded on the eve of

the Declaration of Independence. "I read and read again your charming letters, and they serve me, in some faint degree, as a substitute for the company and conversation of the writer. I want to take a walk with you in the garden, to go over to the common, the plain, the meadow. I want to take Charles in one hand and Tom in the other, and walk with you, Abby on your right hand and John upon my left, to view the corn fields, the orchards."

It would be silly indeed to believe that John Adams, as he boasted so often, was unsusceptible to the charms of worldly success and the power and the glory of public life. But he had already experienced in youth so many intoxications of this kind that he had become fairly hard-headed. His political prestige in Massachusetts and the Continental Congress, moreover, were costing him dear. For four years in Congress his salaries were less than the inflated wages of one hired man on his farm.<sup>5</sup> His family was spending from savings made before the Revolution, and living also from such reserves as his people had built up in lands, houses, barns, and cattle on the Penn's Hill properties.

"Some of my friends, who had more compassion for me and my family than others," he noted years later in an autobiographical fragment, "suggested to me what I knew well before, that I was losing a fortune every year by my absence. Young gentlemen who had been clerks in my office . . . were growing rich. . . . I thought, therefore, that four year's drudgery, and sacrifice of everything, were sufficient . . . and that another might take my place." John Adams asked for leave of absence from Con-

<sup>5</sup> Farm labor in Massachusetts, according to a letter of Abigail Adams written in October 1778, was making from six to eight dollars a day — "\$4. per day for a laborer, and find him, which will amount to four more," as she reckoned it. Potatoes were ten dollars a bushel, flour fifty dollars a hundred weight, meat a dollar a pound, butter twelve shillings a pound.

gress and obtained it in the autumn of 1777. His clients welcomed him and gave him business at once. He was trying a case in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, when Samuel Langdon, President of Harvard, who had just returned from Philadelphia, leaned over the bar and whispered to Adams that Silas Deane had been recalled from France and that Adams had been appointed to take his place. When he returned to the Braintree farm he found a commission making him plenipotentiary to the King of France, and with it a letter saying that the frigate *Boston* was fitting and would take him through the British-dominated Atlantic to a French port.

It is an old story, but still a moving one, how John Adams and his ten-year-old son — both future presidents of the United States — left their native farm one stormy February afternoon, went to the Moon Head Beach in front of Norton Quincy's, and climbed into the barge of the frigate *Boston*. The wind was high and the sea dark and rough, but deep straw in the barge and their watch-coats kept them dry and warm until they could go aboard the man-of-war. They sailed two days later, a bright Sunday morning of dazzling sun and air that sharply illumined the Massachusetts coast until it dropped below the horizon.

John Adams's mission in Europe was brief. He returned to his farm in the summer of 1779. But his departure from it on the French mission of 1778 effectively severed him from the land his people had worked since 1640. He retained ownership of the Penn's Hill properties until his death, but his residence there virtually ended. But his family and his career had been founded there on native soil, nourished and succored in desperate times, well prepared there for the achievements of his middle years. When his energy and sagacity were at last discarded (along with his vanity, irascibility, and fiery candor) he

would return to private life not in the stark, angular cottages of the old family freehold, but to the modest elegance of the Adams mansion in Quincy.

This mansion, where John Adams found refuge in his fall from power in 1801, is today shouldered by suburban neighbors into a fraction of its former domain. But it retains a more spacious and decorous remnant than the Penn's Hill property. There has been, fortunately, no professional restoration, and furnishing and landscaping keep for the most part changes made through the generations, through eras of good, bad, and indifferent taste, thus recording with unusual candor the responses to fashion of an American family of talent and high station from the days of President John Adams until only the other day. The fine things that the eighteenth century took for granted, and many of the pretentious and unlovely ones the nineteenth approved with deep complacency, keep house together amicably enough, but incite melancholy reflections on the decline of grace — the progressive decline of it, in fact, since our agrarian days.

A sketch of the Adams mansion by Eliza Quincy can deepen melancholy to grief for a vanished world, as one views it with Boston in the distant background, the broad fields behind sloping down to salt water. Here is the eighteenth-century gentleman's country-seat of Hanoverian England strayed to New England. It stands clear — in this sketch — of all that banality of the later nineteenth century by which the place is now so closely besieged. Elegance and rural simplicity are charmingly and naïvely exhibited in this amateur drawing of Eliza Quincy's. The gambrel-roofed house with its fertile land stands only slightly back from a road lined with fine trees and separated from it by a rail fence, relic of even more rustic days. The nearest suburb is kept at a safe distance by the harbor — Boston itself composing handsomely around the

State House on a peninsula that might well be an island. The sprawling and squalid shape of things to come had not begun to swallow in unassimilating gluttony the delightful little eighteenth-century capital.

Here the farm boy and provincial lawyer who had employed the moral and material usufruct of generations of rural life in founding a brilliant political career returned at last to rural life and well-earned peace. The high-backed chair still standing in its place in John Adams's study is a memorial to the long repose he enjoyed there rereading the classics or planning and directing the work of his several farms; or corresponding with great men of his generation — his mind ripe and vigorously opinionated as he discoursed on politics, literature, philosophy, history, and the frailties of human nature.

On a visit to the Adams Mansion in 1795, John Adams recommenced his journalizing with agricultural notes: "Lime dissolves all vegetable substances . . . and converts them into an immediate food for vegetables." He states that his journal is recommenced to allure him into the habit of writing again, long lost. "I have, in the course of my life, lost it several times, and regained it as often; so I will now," he says confidently. But the entries are few and far between, ending within a year. His diary, brief as it is, pictures a life that continued thus to the end. It tells of barn-raising, bibulous hired men, destructive insects in the corn, barley fields white for the harvest; of heavy showers of rain, refreshing parched gardens and pastures; of birds jubilantly singing as he rose at four of a July morning; of cutting red cedar for fence posts and killing rattlesnakes on Penn's Hill; of runaway horses and strayed cattle. Hired men hoe the corn, mow the meadows, spread the lime and manure. An old apple tree, one hundred years old, is cut down with enough apples on its aged boughs to make two barrels of cider. A wall is removed to

make a ha-ha. He reads a life of Petrarch in two volumes and a passage in the works of Cicero which he had not read in his youth, rereading also Cicero's *De Officiis*. The men got in three loads of salt hay from the marsh. They burned brush on Penn's Hill. John Adams reflected favorably on the Christian religion and on antique virtue. The apple crop was picked and the cider pressed. A brook was widened and he considered naming his place Peacefield, in commemoration of the peace of 1783 (which he assisted in making) and because of the constant peace and tranquillity he enjoyed in his rural life.

In Abigail Adams's letters to her sister, Mary Cranch,<sup>6</sup> written during John Adams's vice-presidency and during his presidency, also, there are many homely details of the Quincy farm economy that are, no doubt, accurately descriptive of ways and means. The Quincy farm paid little enough in cash returns — at the best about one per cent — but supplied the absentee farmer, as it did later the resident one, with ample stores of hay, oats, rye, barley, butter, cheese, apples, pears, cider, bacon, and ham. The Adamses, even while John Adams held high office, depended on the Quincy farms for much of their daily bread. When they retired to Quincy, they were almost wholly dependent on their farming there. As John Adams himself said in a letter to Benjamin Waterhouse in 1806: "As much as I am charmed with my Mount Wollaston, I would not wholly forsake the . . . Bar, if my generous Country had not destroyed my organs of Speech, before she turned me loose to get my bread upon a farm. Horace is full of Advice to me and when I received your letter I was reading his 16 Ode, Book 3." He quoted this Ode in full.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Abigail Adams's Letters, a collection, chiefly to Mary Cranch, in the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

<sup>7</sup> "As money grows, care follows it and the hunger for more. I am right in dreading to lift my crest into the world's sight (am I not?), Maecenas. . . . The more a man denies to himself, the more shall he receive from heaven. . . . A stream of pure water, and a wood a few

From Quincy in 1808 Abigail Adams wrote to her daughter<sup>8</sup> of the familiar joys and sorrows of the farm: the heavy crop of hay that cannot be entirely harvested because of short labor and high wages; the "unusually" late spring retarding the crops and huddling the family around wood-fires in June; or the really unusually early spring when asparagus was cut on the twenty-fifth of April, daffodils blooming then and peach and pear orchards in full bloom, and peas ready for the supporting brush. Then there was the over-long winter with its rheumatism and tedious confinement, its hope of spring so very long deferred, and the house so filled with family connections and family that there was no privacy for the retired president except in his study, where he spent his mornings indefatigably reading and writing. There was a bad apple year when they made only four barrels of cider. An old gardener left suddenly and the new one blamed his predecessor for everything that went wrong. Grain failed in all parts of the state one year. The poultry were so mischievous that they were banished: "Not a solitary hen upon our territories, or a stately cock." Another year commerce was dead and agriculture was its chief mourner. The gardener did not know how to manage his "help." Floors were painted plain yellow one season; a garden wall built as soon as frost was out of the ground; the strawberry bed uncovered by Stetson, who was the only one who knew how to care for it properly. The house was cleaned and whitewashed. Punch was made by the gallon from wine, brandy, and good Jamaica rum. Salt-

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acres broad, and crops which never break faith with me, are a happier lot than his, little as he thinks it, who glitters in the lordship of fertile Africa. . . . By narrowing my desires I may better extend my revenues. . . ." Excerpts translated by E. C. Wickman: *Horace for English Readers* (London: Oxford University Press; 1930).

<sup>8</sup> Abigail Adams's Letters, an unpublished collection, chiefly to her daughter Abigail Adams Smith, in the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

peter and molasses were laid in for curing bacon. Fowls, ham, and cheeses were sent to grateful friends, or a barrel of apples or pears or rye flour.

But "I do not know of any person's property so unproductive as ours is. I do not believe it yields one per cent per annum," Abigail Adams complained, wishing in vain that John Adams could have been persuaded to invest less in land and more in public securities. However, if the cash yield was small, the table and the cellars and store-rooms were filled to capacity with a great variety of good things to eat and drink; the barns were stored with provender for horses and cattle. No good man was denied in moderation the cheer of hard cider, wine, or spirits. The insupportable cares and drudgery and calumnies of public life were at last a fading memory. There was peace at Peacefields.

In his seventy-fourth year, with nearly two decades of ripe old age ahead of him, John Adams, ever dwelling Puritanwise on the shortness of life, began to design his tomb and compose his epitaph. "No higher ambition remains with me," he wrote in November 1808, "than to build a tomb upon the summit of the hill before my door, covered with a six foot cube of Quincy granite, with an inscription like this:

SISTE, VIATOR

*With much delight these pleasing hills you view,  
Where Adams from an envious world withdrew,  
Where sick of glory, faction, power, and pride,  
Sure judge how empty all, who had all tried,  
Beneath his shades the weary chief repos'd,  
And life's great scene in quiet virtue clos'd.*

The contentedly aging man, who could enjoy his own tomb prospectively, nevertheless walked three or four miles a day, and now and then rode ten or fifteen miles.



He still vigorously scolded the world from which he had withdrawn: "The folly, the pride, the vanity, the selfishness, the artifice, the low craft and mean cunning, the want of principle, the avarice, the unbounded ambition, the unfeeling cruelty of a majority of those (in all nations) who are allowed an aristocratic influence, and on the other hand the stupidity with which the even more numerous multitude not only become their dupes, but even love to be taken in by their tricks." But he qualified his pessimism: "I can never be a misanthrope — *Homo sum*. I must hate myself before I can hate my fellow men; and that I cannot, and will not do. No! I will not hate any of them, base, brutal, and devilish as some of them have been to me."

"Vain man!" he exhorted Thomas Jefferson at eighty-two. "Mind your own business! Do no wrong! Do all the good you can! Eat your canvas-back ducks! Drink your Burgundy! Sleep your siesta, when necessary, and TRUST IN GOD!"

A year later he announced to Jefferson: "The dear partner of my Life for fifty four years as a Wife and for many more Years as a Lover now lyes, in extremis, forbidden to Speak or be Spoken to."

For seven years he survived this partner with whom he had shared married love for more than half a century of great vicissitude and of concluding evening peace. Moral defeatists who despair of decent human relationships, as they strive fanatically for economic and social utopias, are brusquely refuted in their skepticism about marriage by the devoted married lives of John Adams, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and many another early president of the United States for whom the bonds of marriage were stable and happy. The early Republic was rich in such marriages in high and low places.

At last John Adams gave up his walks in the garden. His reading and writing were done for him as he sat in the high-backed chair where he had done so much of both. His long, happy senescence was now rapidly saddened not only by the loss of his wife, but also of children and many friends. It is well known how calmly he breathed his last, how his last words and thought were of his greatest and worthiest rival, Thomas Jefferson, who, unknown to Adams, was meeting his destiny this same Fourth of July on his own broad farmlands in Virginia. Piedmont earth and Massachusetts loam, which these great Americans tended for so many years with skill and love and care, had produced and nurtured to high stature these two native husbandmen and statesmen and, in the fullness of time and harvest, on the same day, welcomed them home.



## II

### GEORGE WASHINGTON: TIDEWATER PLANTATION

Two Potomac plantations were the scene of George Washington's infancy. He was born in earliest Virginia spring among lambs and colts and calves, on lowlands between Pope's and Bridge's Creeks where the Potomac begins to broaden into Chesapeake Bay. Here his first infantile wonder beheld land and water, crops and fallows, pastures and forests, and the few men and women, slave and free, who dwelt on the patriarchal acres. These acres were first farmed by his great-grandfather John Washington, cast away on this shore during a winter storm of 1656 when he was voyaging to Virginia for tobacco. In George Washington's third year his family moved up the Potomac fifty miles to the site of Mount Vernon. Here, again, estuarial waters and corn and tobacco lands and slaves and farm animals made up a wholly rural environment, varied only by the occasional ship that came from Bristol or London for his father's tobacco. Infancy, childhood, adolescence — all passed without his seeing a town. He reached manhood without knowing one of more than five thousand. Country-born and country-bred, his life had quickened in the energetic body of a mother who shared — much more than shared, it may be — an easy-going father's

management of an early eighteenth-century Virginia plantation. George Washington took in with his mother's milk the hopes and cares and eternal health of the farm, its endless responsiveness to time and season, wind and weather, and its deep underlying peace.

Visit his birthplace near Pope's Creek and you will find the landscape virtually unchanged. The generations of the Washingtons and their houses and barns and slave quarters are long gone. Nothing is left here of human increment but a few table tombstones with undecipherable inscriptions. The virgin forest of the werowances has dwindled to a fine grove of cedars, where a tame turkey-cock and his hens forage on a low bluff over Pope's Creek. Indian corn still waves in summer and the cuckoo still mourns on early spring days. Strain your eyes as you may, except for reconstructed plantation buildings around you, you cannot discern a single human habitation over the flat land or beyond the tidal waters. Vision moves over the broad spaces of the Potomac and its bordering fields and groves without once resting upon house or barn or upon some distant jutting of a modern city on the horizon. Still thinly peopled and remote, this Virginia of Washington's infancy and nativity is a region where time has stood still; and a melancholy and wistful peace still reigns there, undisturbed since the seventeenth century.

The original agricultural and maritime life of the first English and Dutch colonists along the North Atlantic coast, now obliterated by slums and factories and dreary suburbs in so many regions of the Middle States and New England, has been spared in most of Tidewater Virginia. Nowhere is this more mercifully true than at Wakefield, as Washington's birthplace on the lower Potomac came to be called in the later eighteenth century. Amid skilful reconstructions of house and garden, it is not hard to imagine the infant schooling that this plantation afforded

George Washington as he took his first steps out-of-doors, with the fragrance of hay and herb garden and boxwood and roses, the wholesome pungency of woodsmoke and salt marsh and barnyard about him. Here dawned a consciousness that would never free itself long from its first nurse and tutor — from the charms of plantation life by a broad river, overflowing with brilliant light and cool air upon the warm land. Here his first love of the farm came to him, and he would remain true to it until death.

This lifelong love, born at Wakefield, flourished through Washington's boyhood at Hunting Creek (now Mount Vernon) and at the frontier farm of his widowed mother on the Rappahannock. Early transplanting from lower to upper Potomac strengthened and deepened its roots, and it grew with such health and grace that Washington eventually bequeathed to us at Mount Vernon one of the most beautiful relics of eighteenth-century country life that can be seen in the land.

It has been stated with bland assurance by contemporary social historians that the arts and the sciences have always been city-born and city-bred; that civilization is necessarily a product of urban organization. But in eighteenth-century England, to take only one instance, all the arts flourished almost exclusively in country air. It was an age when the court and the city were virtually without cultural influence and were infrequently and reluctantly visited by the best minds and talents.<sup>1</sup> The great Doctor

<sup>1</sup> "But the English aristocracy had not one centre but hundreds, scattered all over the country in 'gentlemen's seats' and provincial towns, each of them a focus of learning and taste that more than made up for the decay of learning at the official Universities and of taste at the Hanoverian Court. George II patronized Handel's music but nothing else. It did not matter, because patronage had passed into thousands of other hands—though not yet into the hands of millions. Oxford University did nothing for Gibbon, and Royalty had nothing to say to him except, 'Hey, what Mr. Gibbon, scribble, scribble, scribble!' But the reading public of the day was just of the size and quality to give proper recognition to his

Johnson, in fact, was something of a freak in his strict devotion to London. Urbanity, in spite of the word's derivation, dwelt in and around the country seats of Hanoverian England. The great lords and their protégés commonly mingled their love of sport and agriculture with devotion to literature and other fine arts. English, French, Italian, Greek, and Latin classics ranged row on row to the ceilings of their spacious libraries, which were also adorned often enough with the best painting and sculpture of their age and preceding centuries. Patronage of the arts and sciences went by default of kings to country gentlemen and lords, who gave tone to an age still unsurpassed in modern times for elegance and virtuosity and widespread creative talent. The great men of the age, to be sure, were politically-minded. They were, nearly all of them, active in political intrigue, and many of them were monstrously venal. But politics remained practically their only liaison with the court and the town; and when they appeared in the Lords or the Commons, they came often enough in their country greatcoats, booted and spurred, exhaling country air mixed with good Madeira. They would quote Horace at the drop of a hat or discuss by the hour Jethro Tull's *Horse-Hoeing Husbandry*.<sup>2</sup>

In Washington's infancy and boyhood, William Byrd II,

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greatness. . . ." G. M. Trevelyan: *English Social History* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company; 1944), 399.

<sup>2</sup> Jethro Tull's *Horse-Hoeing Husbandry, or an Essay on the Principles of Tilling and Vegetation*, published in 1733, had a vogue comparable to the recent *Plowman's Folly*, by Edward H. Faulkner (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 1943). Tull invented the seed drill. He practised pulverizing the surface soil with horse-drawn implements instead of by hand-hoeing, a radical innovation. He advised against manuring because of the weed seeds organic manures contain and because he believed he could get sufficient fertility by means of finer tilth than had been obtained from the hoe. "He seems to have believed that plants live on fine particles of soil, instead of minerals in solution," according to N. S. B. Gras in his *A History of Agriculture* (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company; 1940), 212.

intimate of English eighteenth-century politicians, lords, artists, scientists, and *dilettanti*, re-created their high style of country living at Westover on the lower James River, mingling Old World luxury with the patriarchal simplicity of Virginia in a home that rivalled manor and chateau with its conversation, books, paintings, sculpture, silver plate, and mahogany, its damasks and Italian marble. His establishment and its style of life were of great influence on Virginia country life for at least a generation. It was a forerunner of Mount Vernon.

"I have a large Family of my own," Byrd wrote of his plantation at Westover in 1726, "and my Doors are open to Every Body, yet I have no bills to pay, and half-a-crown will rest undisturbed in my Pocket for many Moons together. Like one of the Patriarchs, I have my Flocks and my Herds, my Bond-men and Bond-women, and every Soart of Trade amongst my own Servants, so that I live in a Kind of Independance on every one but Providence."

This most elegant of all eighteenth-century Virginia plantations demonstrated early in our history that nearly all the amenities of the Old World could flourish in the New. But William Byrd's life was not so completely independent under God as he boasted. It was sheltered by high political protection in London and Virginia, erected on inherited wealth and many special privileges. It was based on Negro slavery and the temporary white servitude of indentured servants and, perhaps, of transported felons. Still one may question whether the happiness and dignity of all concerned in its well-rounded unity were inferior to those of many millions of "free" men who were induced to emigrate to America in another century — men free to inhabit dark, filthy slums, and to live and die under the lordship of political bosses and an industrial management which cruelly exploited their labor and was not responsible in the least for their health and well-being.

In any case, such early plantation life, founded on Negro slavery and white servitude, unconscionable evils, produced great Americans whose character and genius have not been surpassed in our history: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Robert E. Lee, to name only three of the greatest. There were many thousands of Virginia yeomen, too, dwelling on small holdings who likewise maintained themselves and their families by means of tobacco and corn and white and black servitude. The servile state, like universal freedom today, was harsh or humane very much according to the disposition of the master and the man. It was the introduction of the cotton gin and the methods of mass production, both inventions of that blameless Connecticut Yankee, Eli Whitney, that would make a fiendish institution of involuntary servitude years later in some regions of the Old Southwest. The eighteenth-century Virginia plantation was a large family affair, in which the health and happiness of all workers were still in plain view of a master who, at the very least, cared for his people with the same self-interest with which he cared for his cattle. In his later years George Washington annually sold property to support slaves who were no longer of economic value to his plantation. This was not an unusual indulgence of the patriarchal sense of responsibility so common in eighteenth-century Virginia. The capitalistic agriculture of the Cotton Kingdom in the nineteenth century, however, often regarded the slave as a mere chattel, or, shall we say, as an interchangeable part in the great machine of mass production then first being assembled, tossing him on the scrap heap as promptly as efficiency demanded.

But tobacco, not cotton, *is* the history of early Virginia. Tobacco is likewise the genealogy and biography of George Washington well into his middle years. His immigrant great-grandfather, as we have noted, was ship-



wrecked on a voyage to Virginia for tobacco. If this John Washington's plantation was typical of its time and place, then its main crops were corn and tobacco — one, the chief sustenance of men and farm animals; the other, currency in the colony, and cash or credit in London (very frequently debt there, too, with heavy interest to pay to the factor). Many years later Thomas Jefferson said: "Long experience has proved . . . to us that there was never an instance of a man's getting out of debt who was once in the hands of a tobacco merchant and bound to consign tobacco to him."<sup>3</sup>

There are no records of the farming of John Washington, immigrant ancestor of George, nor of his son and grandson on the lands near Pope's and Bridge's Creeks; but it is safe to assume that these generations grew tobacco for London factors, receiving in return tools, house furnishings, clothes, and many other necessities not produced in Virginia, and at times of high tobacco prices many modest luxuries, as extant inventories show. But the Virginia tobacco planter was seldom out of debt. For the years of high prices went to his head and led him into extravagant standards and commitments. He bought more luxury goods than he could well afford and invested

<sup>3</sup> "The credit system frequently made the planter an economic vassal of the merchant. Not infrequently accounts between merchants and planters ran for years without being balanced. Keith stated about 1738 that two thirds of the Virginia planters were so deeply in debt that they were not free to change factors. According to Ramsay, it was difficult to be sure how much a man's wealth really was, and there were frequently great surprises in the winding up of estates." L. S. Gray: *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Washington: The Carnegie Institution; 1933), 415. Thomas Jefferson said that the tobacco planters of Virginia were a species of property annexed to certain mercantile houses in London. He once estimated the indebtedness of the planters as high as ten million dollars. Robert Beverley, in his history of seventeenth-century Virginia (1705) said: "But as they have no body that is poor to beggary, so they have few that are rich; their Estates being regulated by the Merchants in *England*, who it seems know best what is Profit enough for them, in the Sale of their Tobacco and other Trade."

in more land than his capital could well develop. Meanwhile tobacco gluttonously devoured fertility in his older lands. The movement of settlers up into the Piedmont and over the Blue Ridge into the Great Valley, and subsequently to the Ohio, was due to complex causes, human, economic, and divine; but it was chiefly a movement away from soil exhausted for the time being by corn and tobacco. It may very well have been the depredations of the latter, a greedier crop than maize even, that at last moved the Wakefield Washington family up the Potomac to fresher land at the site of Mount Vernon and over into the valley of the Rappahannock, where George Washington's father was drawn also by an interest in iron. The father was residing there at the time of his death in Washington's eleventh year.

From its beginnings the policy of the Virginia Company of London had encouraged the production of such "solid commodities" as iron and had been strongly in favor of diversified farming. Specialization in tobacco had been frowned upon for generations — legislated against, even; but it was speculation in this weed, its large initial and occasional profits, and Negro slavery that had finally got Tidewater Virginia on its feet. Never mind how it staggered later under the burden of debt gradually accumulated upon a progressively impoverished soil. Moreover, tobacco, in good years and bad, made money for the merchants in London; and when was a home capitalist economy, protected by the state, tender about plucking colonial geese? Certainly not in the days of British mercantilism and the merchant-state. Grant mercantilism and the richer and longer-headed London capitalists ability to see plainly where tobacco was leading, and admit that they endeavored to force or persuade Virginia colonists into a sounder economy. Nevertheless, it took an exhausted soil, bankruptcy, and general impoverishment at

the end of several generations to teach Tidewater Virginia a sound diversified farming such as the Pennsylvania Dutch adopted as a matter of course from their beginnings in the New World.

George Washington, during many years of surveying and soldiering in older and newer lands of Virginia, even as far west as the Ohio River, complicated and deepened his love of the land and of agriculture with a strong sense of real property, with a land hunger that many thousands of acres could not appease. Running lines along the great Fairfax properties in Tidewater and Piedmont Virginia and conquering a fertile empire from the French over the mountains made him lordly in his desire for landed property. When he married Martha Custis, perhaps the richest proprietress in Virginia, and at twenty-seven concentrated his energies — for life, as he thought — in farming his Mount Vernon estate, he was already possessed of a dukedom in land in Virginia. He was fairly a margrave of waste land and forests over the Appalachians. But he was still enslaved to tobacco-growing, still, like his forebears, a vassal of the London factors. It took several years of farming at Mount Vernon in his late twenties to make him realize that tobacco would not do; in fact, that it had never done and could not do, ever, in spite of its vested hold on Virginia and its intermittent, specious, bright promises of wealth, its occasional years of great profit. Among the declarations of independence of this time, none was more fundamental in Virginia than Washington's and Jefferson's declaration of independence from tobacco and its merchants in London. Many other Virginians were seeing the light about tobacco-growing, but it was from Mount Vernon and Monticello, in good measure, that the light came.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "Although Thomas Jefferson, John Randolph, Thomas Pickering, John Adams, and Henry Clay played a part in furthering the cause of

It is often believed that George Washington had to absent himself most of his life from Mount Vernon. As a matter of fact he lived there nearly a third of a century, nearly half of his life — four years of childhood, five of adolescence, fifteen of early married life, and six from the end of the Revolution until his first term as first President of the United States. The last two years of his life were spent in retirement there. When he began his domestic life at Mount Vernon in the spring of 1759 he established himself on land that had been in the Washington family since 1674. It was part of a grant made to his great-grandfather, John Washington, and an associate, Nicholas Spencer, by Thomas Culpepper, then Royal Governor of Virginia (to whom Charles II, in his large-handed way, had given title to the colony in 1673). Known for generations as the Little Hunting Creek Plantation, after the Potomac estuary on which it was situated, it had been renamed Mount Vernon by Lawrence Washington, elder half-brother of George, in honor of Admiral Vernon, Lawrence Washington's commander in the disastrous siege of Cartagena in 1741. Lawrence Washington,

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agriculture, generally in the direction of a more balanced system, nevertheless it was George Washington who stood first — with the plow as with the sword. Washington was a business farmer who with great industry kept track of the 3260 acres that he cultivated . . . . Anxious to put his land into good condition and to get the maximum returns from the soil, he planned to introduce the scientific rotation, instead of the old system of Indian corn, wheat, and a period of idling. . . . But Washington found it easier to win a war than to introduce a new system of agriculture. There is no escape from the verdict that he failed. . . . He was trying to cultivate too large an estate. His plantation was not too big for the old system, but it was for the new. If the estate had been 300 instead of over 3000 acres, he might have had more success. . . . He was trying to do the impossible, introducing new and often untried crops into practical farming before they had passed the experimental stage in his district. . . . It cannot, of course, be said that he failed utterly, for the effort was noteworthy. Friends going to visit him and strangers prowling around out of curiosity, doubtless brought back information about what he was trying to accomplish." N. S. B. Gras: *A History of Agriculture* (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company; 1940), 296-7.

whose health was ruined at Cartagena, died nine years later, leaving Mount Vernon to his widow — a relict who remarried very promptly, leasing the estate to George Washington for an annual rent of 15,000 pounds of tobacco. At her death in 1761, title passed to the leaseholder.

Not a trace is left of the house at Little Hunting Creek where George Washington spent four years of his childhood. The general belief is that it burned to the ground in 1739 when the family moved to the Rappahannock frontier, to live on a plantation called Ferry Farm, across the river from the little backwoods settlement of Fredericksburg. Nothing is left of their dwelling there. Washington's birthplace near Pope's Creek burned in the late eighteenth century. Of all these homes of his infancy, childhood, and boyhood, only a few bricks and stones remain. The second dwelling at Mount Vernon miraculously survives and is incorporated in the present mansion. It was built by Lawrence Washington in 1743 — the familiar two-story rectangular farmhouse, unornamented and without pretensions to architectural style. It was commodious for that day, with its four chambers and two central hallways, upstairs and down. For years after his marriage George Washington lived in this typical, box-like farmhouse of the well-to-do eighteenth-century American farmer, with its typical Virginia outbuildings and dependencies for slaves, and the detached farm kitchen. It was not radically remodeled until 1773. The house began to take its present shape during the proprietor's long absences at the Continental Congress and with the American armies. Reconstruction, made according to Washington's plans, under the direction of Lund Washington, superintendent of Mount Vernon during the Revolution, was not finally completed until George Washington returned from the

war — again, as he hoped, to spend the rest of his days there.

In its final form Mount Vernon is an American version of the English country house, showing strong Renaissance influences that had long been the mode in the old country. Virginia had lived for generations, like New England, in farm cottages of a medieval type: very modest dwellings indeed, usually of wood, of one story or a story and a half, with massive end chimneys of brick, and often with the same steep pitch to the roof as a New England salt-box cottage (but seldom with a lean-to roof sweeping down almost to the ground on the north side). The Adam Thoroughgood house in Princess Anne County and the Christian House at Providence Forge are among the best examples of this earliest Virginia domestic architecture. The latter is almost a counterpart of the vanished house in which George Washington was born at Pope's Creek.

George Washington was not twenty-seven years old when he "retired" to Mount Vernon to enjoy the life of a planter the rest of his days. For a young man who had made a great name for himself fighting the French he was certainly precocious in his desire to live out of the world. "I am now I believe fixed at this seat with an agreeable Consort for Life. And I hope to find more happiness in retirement than I ever experienced amidst a wide and bustling world," he wrote to a kinsman in London in the winter of 1759, shortly after his marriage. Again, as in the letters and journals of John Adams, such sentiments must be taken in their eighteenth-century context. Fashion favored a disillusioned worldliness in the manner of Horace. It was, moreover, a time when the path of glory visibly led to the military graves of the Seven Years' War. James Wolfe, who is believed to have read Gray's *Elegy* on the eve of the Battle of Quebec with such sincere admiration,

was <sup>5</sup> about to become a heroic instance of Gray's generalization. George Washington had gone far on the path of glory and would go farther. But at this moment of his life he was genuinely, as well as fashionably, disillusioned with military and public life. The romantic belief that happiness resided in rural seclusion perfectly suited his mood. Moreover, he was a country gentleman by birth and vocation. From boyhood he had looked forward to living a Virginia planter's life. In his boy's commonplace book he had copied in his fine copperplate hand the following rhymed reflections on the supposed peace of country life:

*These are the things, which once Possess'd  
Will make a life thats truly bless'd  
A Good Estate on healthy Soil  
Not got by Vice, nor yet by Toil:  
Round a warm Fire, a Pleasant Joke,  
With Chimney ever free from Smoke:  
A Strength entire, A Sparkling Bowl,  
A quiet Wife a quiet Soul,  
A Mind as well as body, whole.  
Prudent Simplicity, constant Friend,  
A diet which no art Commends;  
A Merry Night without much Drinking  
A Happy Thought without much Thinking;  
Each Night by Quiet Sleep made Short*

<sup>5</sup> "Everyone knows the story that, as the boats drifted down from Cap Rouge to the Anse au Foulon in the early hours of September 13, Wolfe recited passages from Gray's *Elegy* and said he would rather have written the poem than take Quebec. Most recent writers on Wolfe have rejected the tale, urging that Wolfe would never have transgressed his own orders for strict silence. . . . It is, however, widely agreed that Wolfe recited and praised the *Elegy* some time on September 12, perhaps when reconnoitring from a boat. . . . It is evident from the state of the book [Wolfe's copy of the *Elegy*] that it had been enthusiastically read and carefully pondered. Among the lines underscored are "The paths of glory lead but to the grave. . . ." W. T. Waugh: *James Wolfe, Man and Soldier* (Montreal: L. Carrier & Company; 1928), Appendix I, 311.

*A Will to be but what thou art:  
Possess'd of these, all else defy  
And neither wish nor fear to Die.*<sup>6</sup>

Born and reared in open country when it was high fashion to live there, Washington's "retirement" in his late twenties was not merely in the manner of Alexander Pope or Lord Bolingbroke, whose shunning of the world attracted so much favorable attention and also such hordes of visitors earlier in the century. The sentiments of his copy-book and their healthy epicureanism were the usual ones of his time and place. The rhyme, in fact, is more or less descriptive of Virginia plantation life as it was led in his boyhood and full manhood. The good estate, the great wood fires, the wide variety of excellent food, and the sparkling punch-bowl (frequently refilled during long evenings when there was seldom too little drinking); the minuets and the quadrilles and the games of loo; the discreet Virginia wives who flirted so spiritedly yet kept flirtation well in hand; the horses and hounds; the lively social life based on consanguinity and genuine friendship; the exceedingly unostentatious intellectual life, which, nevertheless, was well versed in the classics and the best current literature — these were indeed the robust and unaffected joys of a country life founded in the serious and exacting business of agriculture. Eighteenth-century Virginia planters, like their Hanoverian cousins in England, took for granted a lot of blessings which have so far and so long vanished from the world that they are believed by many contemporaries to have been merely poetic figments or literary conventions or sheer sentimentality.

When George Washington married and settled down at Mount Vernon his military adventures and misadventures

<sup>6</sup> From a school exercise book of George Washington's, as quoted by Paul Leland Haworth in *George Washington: Farmer* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company; 1915).



had made his name known in Boston, Philadelphia, Paris, and London. He had achieved renown and had been naïvely surprised to find that its twin is calumny — a Siamese twin, in fact. He had become famous overnight in the capitals of the world, where he had been labelled variously a hero, a dunce, and a villain. Perhaps the most embarrassing of all these attributions was that of heroism. When this was made by his colleagues in the Virginia House of Burgesses he was so abashed that he could not speak. Not the least timid in the face of responsibility or danger, George Washington was, nevertheless, a very diffident young man socially. This diffidence had been kicked upstairs in his first youth by his half-brother Lawrence and by Lord Fairfax, into whose family Lawrence had married. These men of the world could see through the young man's inarticulate gravity to the qualities of leadership that were forming in him. They threw him at a very early age into the stormy political and military waters of Virginia, confident that he would learn to strike out for himself. Washington had done well under their patronage, but he had not got up a sharp appetite for fame and power — which seem rather to have depressed him. In fact he suffered, shortly before his marriage, something very like a nervous breakdown. Recovering from it, he resumed the ruling passion of his life. He had always wanted to farm, to found a family, and to build up an estate in land, let glory festoon this career if it must. For sixteen years after his first encounter with public life, he lived uninterruptedly as he liked to live, not as the extraordinary times he was born into would soon demand that he live — desperately and in continual self-abnegation, leading a new nation into being.

This new nation would remain an agrarian republic for nearly a hundred years and as such would grow in virility and high reputation in the world. It is beautifully fitting

that its founder preluded his brilliant military and political career by establishing at Mount Vernon an estate to which a colony and later a nation of farmers and planters could look for light and leading. Mount Vernon has become a national memorial to our agrarian beginnings. Those who remind us that George Washington is dead and that Mount Vernon is a fossil of our early social history unfortunately are speaking the truth. But they do not, saying so, reconcile us to the mediocre leadership of our time or to the badly conceived and cheaply and hastily executed human institutions of the present, which do not promise one day to become fossil forms nearly as attractive as Mount Vernon. In any case, the order and beauty and elegance of Mount Vernon and the character and energy and honor of George Washington are agreeable to contemplate, and such contemplation may put us in accord with an American past that is not only edifying but also viable — a past pregnant, as good traditions in good and bad times so often are, with a bright future.

At Mount Vernon, the manor, a great human and social institution which grew out of the Teutonic village and the Roman villa in the decline of the Roman Empire, at last was taking a curtain call and withdrawing from the world. This beautiful plantation on the upper Potomac was a manor in nearly every way except in its specialization and speculation (for a time) in tobacco for cash profit. Farming for money profit, not for a living as in the Middle Ages, was a new characteristic of Tudor agriculture that would grow until it dominated political and social and economic life in the form of mercantile and industrial capitalism. Curiously enough, as we have pointed out, it was the sheep that founded capitalism in England. The wealth of England, at any rate, was being founded even as early as the reign of Edward III on the best wool grown in Europe — that of the British Isles. Diversified subsist-

ence farming gradually gave way to specialization in sheep-breeding, grazing, and wool-growing. The profits from sheep — direct, to the grazier, and, indirect, to the wool-merchant and weaver — were very great, and furnished capital for nearly all the new enterprises that sprang up in England in the late Middle Ages. It was these unusual profits that disrupted the manor system.

The manor, in its break-up, retrogressed from agriculture to pastoral enterprise on a large scale, letting fields tilled for centuries return to pasture for immense flocks. At the same time it courted destruction by depending thereafter, in most cases, not on self-maintaining agriculture but on the price of wool — whose fluctuations introduced into a hitherto self-sufficient farming a rhythm that we are now unhappily very familiar with in the periodic depressions and booms of capitalism. Back into the pastoral age and forward into the capitalistic era swung the Tudor farmers in a movement that finally destroyed the manor and ushered in the blessings we now enjoy.

At Mount Vernon, George Washington for a time mingled new and old ways. Not the ancient basic commodity, wool, but the new luxury, tobacco, kept his farming in its earlier days badly out of balance, insecure, and chronically in debt. But Washington's residence at Mount Vernon from 1759 to 1774 educated him out of the fallacy of a one-crop system and into the restoration of a diversified agriculture somewhat like that of the Middle Ages. It educated him in the new tactics of capitalistic agriculture and in the old strategy of the manor. He employed new agricultural techniques, that is, but gradually resumed the ground-plan of self-sustenance. When he was called away to lead the American Revolution, he was in the way of establishing in Virginia a new version of manor life that might have dominated the South for many generations. But the cotton gin and mass production methods and the

profit motive, as we have said, intervened to restore specialization and to intensify the evils of Negro slavery. Mammon continued to rule the plantation, no longer through London tobacco factors, but through New York and Philadelphia and Liverpool bankers who financed cotton growers in a similar fashion. Bankers were not at all averse to the growers' remaining deeply in debt to them at good rates of interest. The cotton growers amiably cooperated with the moneylenders by habitually living beyond their means and in vain hope of having their means catch up with their extravagance and luxury. This happened infrequently in years of unusually good markets for cotton, but often enough to maintain their delusions of splendor. When the Cotton Kingdom came, Virginia tobacco plantations, exhausted by years of tobacco growing, happily enough could not specialize in cotton and began to restore their fertility in a rational, diversified agriculture. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, as we have noted, began such an agriculture long before it had to be attempted in sheer desperation in Virginia.

The Virginia plantation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, seriously unbalanced and at last devastated by tobacco growing for cash profit, was, however, not capitalistic but traditional in its human organization. It was fundamentally a family institution. Even the ugly and indefensible institution of Negro slavery had healthy and happy and well-formed men and women as the aim of its breeding. As for the masters, whatever the aim of their own breeding, their families produced the great majority of the founders of the Republic — men whose ability and character have not been surpassed in our history by any single group deriving from a common background. The southern yeomen, too, who were always a majority among southern agriculturists, in colonial and early Federal days produced many first-rate men. It is ironical that

George Washington, progenitor of the nation, and the greatest patriarch of our agrarian days, was denied progeny in his "farm family" — always the most important product of the farm, and still maintaining the population of the nation, rural and urban.<sup>7</sup> Legally, and because George Washington was childless, Mount Vernon, by Lawrence Washington's will, reverted to collateral heirs at George Washington's death. These heirs had to be compensated to hold the estate for Martha Washington. After many vicissitudes and shocking neglect, however, Mount Vernon became the ward of an association which restored it and holds it for the American people.

When he began his forty years of married life there in 1759, in fact, George Washington did not own Mount Vernon. He was merely lessee. Three untimely deaths — his half-brother Lawrence's in 1752, the infant death of Lawrence's daughter Sarah, shortly after, and the death of his widow in 1761 — at last gave George Washington a provisional title to the estate. His marriage to Martha Custis had brought him some of the best lands in Virginia — also valuable town properties in Williamsburg, many slaves, and a small fortune in bonds and London bank stock. Other properties which he had acquired by inheritance or purchase were: the family farm on the Rappahannock (280 acres), left him in his father's will

<sup>7</sup> "Until the Census of 1920, the rural population of the United States outnumbered the urban. This means of course that so far as the total population of the nation that is *rural-born* is concerned it still outnumbers the urban. . . . In a consideration of the relative proportions of rural and urban in the population, it is well to note that between 1920 and 1930, 43.6 per cent of urban growth was derived through migration from the country sections." (*Italics mine.*) Wilson Gee: *The Social Economics of Agriculture* (New York: The MacMillan Company; 1942), 22, 23. Speaking of migrations of rural-born persons to town, one might ask how many of these persons return to the farm, and for how long, when capitalism is unable to give them urban work and wages in one of its frequent depressions? One of the most important forms of city relief is afforded by the family farm free of charge to the sick, modern city during all depressions.

with a few slaves and a few lots in near-by Fredericksburg; a tract of land in Frederick County which he called his "Bullskin Plantation," bought with some of his first earnings as a surveyor in 1748; and two other tracts in that region (about 1000 acres) bought with savings, in 1750 and 1752. Just before his marriage he bought land on Dogue Run near Mount Vernon (500 acres), which was incorporated in the Mount Vernon plantation.

For many years after a marriage that brought him so much property, Washington acquired land by inheritance, by purchase, by mortgage default, and by military grant or bonus, until his landed estate as inventoried in his will amounted to about sixty thousand acres, much of it unimproved land over the mountains. As early as 1771 he was paying quitrents on five thousand acres in Fairfax County, Virginia, on more than two thousand in Frederick County, on twelve hundred and fifty in King George, and on smaller tracts in Loudon and Fauquier Counties.

Of all this vast property in land, acquired through nearly half a century, Mount Vernon was not, in the long run, the most remunerative in money; but it brought Washington immeasurable returns in pride, in domestic happiness, in good living, and in privacy and repose (before fame came to him greatly and public frequentation with it). Mount Vernon was, of course, the most intensively managed of all Washington's properties. Before and after the Revolution, in the two longest intervals of his residence there, his journal is devoted almost exclusively to the details of farming Mount Vernon's several farms. Monotonously the entries begin, day after day: "Rid to Muddy Hole, Dogue Run, and Mill Plantations." After nine years of absence, of revolutionary politics and warfare, of hard and desperate adventure, his journals recommence with nothing to hint that there had been the least interruption in his riding the rounds of his farms:

"Rid to the Mill, Dogue Run, and Muddy Hole," he steadfastly begins again the daily survey of farm activities at Mount Vernon. The Union Farm, the Dogue River Farm, the River Farm, the Muddy Hole Farm, the Mansion House Farm, and the gardens and home industries and kennels and stables there — these were three fourths of life, if not more, during the adult years George Washington lived at Mount Vernon. Their supervision was varied with attendance at the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, church attendance at Pohick (where he was a vestryman), attendance at cock-fights and horse-races, and journeys to the Falls of the Potomac and over the mountains to see properties or interests there.

"No estate in United America," Washington boasted in a letter to the great English agriculturist, Arthur Young, in December 1793, "is more pleasantly situated than this. It lies in a high, dry and healthy country, 300 miles by water from the sea, and, as you will see by the plan, on one of the finest rivers in the world." He added that he could truly say that he had rather be at Mount Vernon with a friend or two about him than attended at the seat of government by the officers of state and the representatives of every power in Europe. Such sentiments, often repeated in correspondence or journals, elevate the faithful noting of farm fact and event into an occasional hymn of praise and thanksgiving. How happy the husbandman, if only he knew his good fortune! George Washington was often very well aware of his and thanked God for it: "The more I am acquainted with agricultural affairs, the better I am pleased with them," he wrote Arthur Young in 1788, "insomuch that I can no where find so great satisfaction as in those innocent and useful pursuits. In indulging these feelings I am led to reflect how much more delightful to an undebauched mind is the task of making im-

provements on the earth than all the vain glory that can be acquired from ravaging it."

George Washington's farm journals are factual. They are emotionally continent, to say the least. The humdrum of farm work and the cares of management drone along through them, day after day, year in, year out, broken rarely by a flare of anger over the incompetence, laziness, or rascality of a slave, overseer, or business agent. Much worry and travail are recorded, but almost none of the pæans and jubilees of the Virginia planter and his slaves, found elsewhere in the rich literature of the plantation, and none of the frolics and pageants of the Old South. The journals kept at Mount Vernon, to tell the truth, are four volumes of dull reading — mere memoranda of duties done, weather observed, agricultural experiments laboriously performed, crops grown and marketed, landscape gardening planned and executed, as Washington for sixteen years of his early domestic life patiently and strenuously improved the ancestral lands at Mount Vernon. These few thousand of none too fertile acres and so much salt marsh, woodland, waste, and pocoson he took in hand in his twenty-seventh year, to make them eventually into one of the most beautiful estates in America.

The map of Mount Vernon, surveyed and drawn by Washington himself and sent to Arthur Young when the estate was well rounded out, shows four farms and the demesne land, amounting altogether to about three thousand acres. The mansion house faces southeasterly upon the Potomac where the river makes its last sharp bend in tidal waters a few miles below Alexandria. One hundred and twenty-five feet above the broad river, which flows roughly east and west at this point, the view carries deep into Maryland with its plains, woods, and distant hills still unmarred by industrial blemishes of any kind. Much



more wooded in Washington's day, this landscape with its pure rural beauty must remain otherwise for the most part unchanged. You may weigh the word and call this panorama of land and water magnificent. It is noble and serene with something of the majesty of St. Germain or the upper Rhine or Hudson in its expanse. The majesty of Mount Vernon, though, derives mostly from natural surroundings, not from the modest dimensions and architecture of the mansion itself — rather from the great free curve of the Potomac and the amplitude of land, sky, and tidal waters that environ it. The manor house, in comparison with Old World palaces and châteaux, is merely charming and dignified.

At the portico of Mount Vernon, facing south, one stands between two estuaries that partly bounded the estate in Washington's day. Neither is plainly in view, but to the left is Little Hunting Creek, which gave its name to these Washington lands in the seventeenth century, and to the right, down river, Dogue Creek, which named one of the five farms that made up the Mount Vernon estate in the eighteenth. Dogue River Farm, Washington's favorite, contained seven fields of about seventy acres each, and meadows and clover reaches amounting to more than a hundred. At the mouth of Dogue Creek or Run was the Union Farm, with seven fields of more than a hundred acres each, more than eighty acres of orchard, thirty of clover, sixty-seven in meadowland. Muddy Hole Farm, up Little Hunting Creek and north of the mansion, contained seven fields of more than a hundred and twenty acres each, more than eighty acres of orchard, and more than two hundred acres of pasture. On Washington's map the Mount Vernon woods are indicated by hundreds of little symbolic trees neatly sketched in by Washington's own hand. They amount to at least one half the estate — a very important part of it, too, for the house itself and many of

its outbuildings are believed to have been constructed for the most part from Mount Vernon timber. Fuel and fencing and barrel staves came from these woods in vast quantity.

The margin of Mount Vernon, as Washington described it to Arthur Young, was washed by more than ten miles of tide water, "from the bed of which, and the innumerable coves, inlets, and small marshes, with which it abounds, an inexhaustible fund of rich mud may be drawn, as a manure, either to be used separately, or in a compost. . . . The soil . . . is a good loam, more inclined however, to clay than sand. From use, and I might add, abuse, it is become more and more consolidated, and of course, heavier to work. . . . [The Potomac] which encompasses the land . . . is well-supplied with various kinds of fish, at all seasons of the year; and, in the spring, with the greatest profusion of shad, herrings, bass, carp, perch, sturgeon, etc. Several valuable fisheries appertain to the estate; the whole shore, in short, is one entire fishery."

Surrounded by its forest and its four farms, high on a steep bluff over the river, stood the mansion in its demesne land, on a poor soil, ravined and gullied — nearly all of it best allotted to timber. Here was assembled the little village of barns, slave quarters, workshops, and other outbuildings — the separate kitchen, the smoke house, dairy, wash house, spinning and weaving rooms, icehouse, and cottages for the butler and gardener. A kitchen garden of nearly an acre flanked one side of the great lawn that extended from the rear of the mansion with a fine vista of distant woods. A formal garden and a greenhouse flanked the opposite side of the lawn. There were barns, stables, storehouses, and slave quarters also on the four outlying farms, and a fishery, a ferry, a distillery, and a gristmill elsewhere on the estate. Here for

many years lived a mixed population of about three hundred souls — master, supervisor, servant, and slave. All were fed, housed, clothed for the most part from their well-organized effort and from the produce of the mediocre soils of Mount Vernon. Corn sustained both slaves and cattle. Pork, preferred by the slaves to beef, was, with herring, their principal fare. Master and family and house slaves had a much greater variety of food than the most privileged families today, and washed it down — game, fowl, beef, mutton, pork, shad, fresh vegetables, and fruit — with good wine, or with beer and whisky produced on the place. Their clothing came for the most part from the best shops in London, but the slaves' was from wool grown, spun, woven, and roughly tailored at Mount Vernon. Good linen, too, was produced at home in sufficient quantity. In spite of this excellent economy, the carefully kept accounts of Mount Vernon often showed money loss and increasing debt to the London factor. There was no mortgage on the old homestead, but if there had been one, the villian tobacco would have held it.

The typical Virginia tobacco planting of his youth which Washington outgrew, abjured, and in a measure reformed, is described in his own words: "There is, perhaps, scarcely any part of America, where farming has been less attended to than in this State. The cultivation of tobacco has been almost the sole object with men of landed property, and consequently a regular course of crops have never been in view. The general custom has been, first to raise a crop of Indian corn . . . which, according to the mode of cultivation, is a good preparation for wheat; then a crop of wheat; after which the ground is respited . . . and so on, alternately, without any dressing, till the land is exhausted; when it is turned out, without being sown with grass-seeds, or any method taken to restore it; and another piece is ruined in the same manner. No more

cattle is raised than can be supported by lowland meadows, swamps, &, and the tops and blades of Indian corn; as very few persons have attended to sowing grasses, and connecting cattle with their crops. The Indian corn is the chief support of the laborers and horses. Our lands . . . were originally very good; but use, and abuse, have made them quite otherwise."

Virginia agricultural practice was thus benighted. Its field labor was lazy and intractable, its overseers, generally speaking, incompetent and dishonest. Many of the masters were dissipated and extravagant. The marketing of their cash crop, tobacco, was in the hands of distant merchants who had very great bargaining advantages over the suppliers — chiefly in the chronic indebtedness of the latter to them. Washington's independence of spirit, his great energy, realism, and good judgment, soon concentrated on two problems: those of markets and of soil conservation. The solution of both required that he forthwith give up growing the traditional crop in the traditional way. The fourth tobacco planter in his line, surrounded by an agricultural economy that was deeply, if not firmly, based on this luxury, it must have required great initiative to break away from the century-old habit of growing and curing tobacco. But George Washington was not at all given to deceiving himself about important things, least of all about the source of his living. In these early days of domestic life he kept his own accounts on the farms, and without the aid of a professional accountant he could see his indebtedness to the London factor growing apace. He could see increasing on his plantations all the common evidences of soil exhaustion. He read with close attention the most recent books from London on the new agricultural methods of the eighteenth century. When he "retired forever" from public life at twenty-seven, he did not at once see the light about tobacco. The first year of

his married life there, he *made* — as they said in Virginia — 34,160 pounds of the weed; but from 1765 on, the weight of his tobacco crop diminished steadily. It was down to about five thousand pounds the last year before the Revolution. As tobacco planting dwindled at Mount Vernon the wheat crop grew and became, at last, George Washington's principal cash crop.

Washington conducted many experiments to improve his yield of wheat, to prevent disease, and defeat injurious insects in his wheat fields. He manured his fields with marl, an innovation at this time. He cut his wheat before it was dead ripe to prevent loss of kernels from shattering. The quality of his wheat and his wheat flour was so good — this had not been true of his tobacco — that he got prices for it well above the market. His flour sold in the West Indies and in New England without inspection. His marketing conditions were in almost every way more advantageous for wheat than they had been for tobacco. He made a contract in 1763 with commission merchants in near-by Alexandria to sell them all his marketable wheat for seven years at about ninety-one cents a bushel, a very favorable price for that time. Let us note also that wheat-growing made much lighter drafts on soil fertility than tobacco.

These were truly golden days for George Washington, the country gentleman. He was employed as he chose to be, living in the land he loved, in a home of his own choice and making, with an "agreeable consort" who managed her household affairs as energetically and capably as he did his farms — offering to friends, who were mostly near neighbors and relations, the warm and decorous and gay hospitality of the Virginia plantation. Public life was reduced to the moderate responsibilities of a seat in the House of Burgesses at Williamsburg, where his wife owned a spacious house that boasted six chimneys! There

they entertained officially and more formally than at Mount Vernon. Laborious, methodical, given to detail and routine with the zeal of a Quaker or Puritan merchant, George Washington nevertheless gave himself with typical Virginia enthusiasm to dancing, cards, shooting, fishing, cocking-mains, horse-racing, and drinking. He had a hard head for the last, but not so hard a head for pretty women and coquettes. With them and with children he overcame his diffidence and the stiff, cool dignity that masked it. He danced and flirted spiritedly, and with children he became facetious, mild, warmly affectionate. Childless himself, his wife's children were as much beloved by him as if they had been his own. Could there have been a more happy and more fulfilling life than that of these sixteen years spent so serenely at Mount Vernon, after the turmoil and disillusion of his first hard bout with life in the Seven Years' War?

The Virginia plantation life of those days has had few rivals in the whole history of American country life for ease, self-sufficiency, amenity. The ease, to be sure, was founded on Negro slavery. The self-sufficiency was being fatally undermined in most cases by a malignant growth of indebtedness. But who could really overwork a Negro slave in those days? Who seriously attempted to do so until mass production of cotton ganged the Negroes and drove them like the machines they were geared to in New England and old England mills? <sup>8</sup> Self-sufficiency was

<sup>8</sup> "As for Sambo, whose wrongs moved the abolitionists to wrath and tears, there is some reason to believe that he suffered less than any other class in the South from 'its peculiar institution.' The majority of slaves were adequately fed, well-cared for, and apparently happy. Competent observers reported that they performed less labor than the hired men in the northern states. Their physical wants were better supplied than those of thousands of Northern laborers, English operatives, and Irish peasants; their liberty was not much less than that enjoyed by the North of England 'hinds' or the Finnish *torpare*." Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager: *The Growth of the American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press; 1942).

available in diversified agriculture for those who, like Washington, freed themselves from tobacco. George Washington, doing so, was one of the most fortunate planters of his century, and one of the best adapted to this cultivator's paradise. Its ease, dangerously enervating to many of his neighbors, he could bear as successfully as later he bore the long, cruel stress of the Revolution. In his extraordinarily methodical life, George Washington had his regular times and seasons for recreation and even dissipation, and he gave himself up to them with all his heart. The relaxing social climate of the eighteenth-century Virginia plantation, the actual climate of the Tidewater region, so bland, so amiable, so fragrant much of the year, and the lenient mores of the time and the place — none of these found a lazy bone in his body or a Sybaritic trait in his mind.

Of his estate routine, unchanged even in his final years of genuine retirement when he was close to three-score and ten, Washington wrote facetiously to his quondam Secretary of War, James McHenry: "I might tell . . . that I begin my diurnal course with the sun; that, if my hirelings are not in their places at that time I send them messages expressive of my sorrow for their indisposition; that, having put these wheels in motion, I examine the state of things further; and the more they are probed, the deeper I find the wounds are which my buildings have sustained by an absence and neglect of eight years; by the time I have accomplished these matters, breakfast . . . is ready; that, this being over, I mount my horse and ride around my farms, which employs me until it is time to dress for dinner. . . ."

The eight years of presidency, like the eight at the Revolution, had not modified in the least Washington's original routine, adopted in his late twenties when he returned to Mount Vernon. The young man returned from the

French and Indian War and the aging one from the presidency of the United States both swing a leg over a horse at the crack of dawn, rain or shine, to ride to the four farms at the far corners of the estate, returning about three to dinner, to spend the rest of the day posting accounts, attending to correspondence, planning another day's or another season's work. Here is an early example, January 1, 1760: "Visited all my plantations and received an Instance of Mr. French's great love of Money in disappointing me of some Pork, because the price had risen to 22/6 after he had engaged to let me have it at 20/ .

"Call'd at Mr. Possey's in my way home and desired him to engage me 100 Bar'ls of Corn upon the best terms he could in Maryland.

"And found Mrs. Washington upon my arrival broke out with the Meazles."

Business, farm routine, and the household news run in just about this proportion throughout the journals for many years — business and routine rather getting the best of the bargain in the long run.

But into such chaste recording of fact and event the sights and sounds and scent of the beautiful Virginia seasons creep unawares at times. Washington's faithful recording of wind and weather unintentionally seduces the reader's imagination now and then. The ice breaks up in the Potomac, the freshets in Dogue Run inundate the mill, the wind veers into the south, it becomes "tolerably" warm, but there is a white frost again. He sets two plows to work in the field by the stable as early as February twenty-sixth, plowing for oats and clover under the direction of the mulatto cook Jack. The weather was very warm for the time of year. It rained in the night. The ground froze hard again March first, but on the third you could plow again. March fifteenth the vast quantities of rain that had fallen in the last two days swelled the wa-



ters so high that Dogue Run carried off the spillway dam and nearly floated the mill itself. On the twenty-ninth, about noon, he set one plow to work on the fallow ground under the hill; a second plow went to work there before sunset. There were fresh and variable winds chiefly from the south. During the month of March the diarist himself grafted forty cherry trees, twelve plums, fifty-four pears, and set out fifty-five cuttings of the Madeira grape. In April, as might very well be expected, the heavy rains slowed down the plowing; but a drying southerly wind now and again made it possible to sow (in ground prepared in March) oats, barley, and lucerne. The harrows were out on the fourth and the seining in the Potomac harvested a few herring and a variety of other fish. Next day the young squire planted twenty pine trees at the head of the cherry walk. The plowing, harrowing, sowing, and seining went on in the rare intervals of good weather that April grudgingly affords the farmer in the so-called temperate zones. Indoors, Washington made soil fertility tests and designed a new plow. The weather did not prevent tuning up old fences and building new ones. On the twenty-second the diarist went to New Kent to inspect Mrs. Washington's plantations there between the York and the James. The overseers were, as usual, much behind in their business. Having visited all the Custis estates there, he went on to Williamsburg to see properties of his own and his wife's in town and near-by. In May mares were bred, plowing and harrowing and seeding went on, and sheep were sheared in weather rather windy and cool for this time of year. An epidemic of smallpox in the region threatened his slaves but did not come to Mount Vernon. He experimented with marl, trying its "virtues" on six hundred hills of tobacco. He bought cattle from his brother John Washington: ten cows, three steers, six calves, one yearling. So the record goes, month after

month, year after year, with occasional absences at the House of Burgesses or other departures from home. Weather, cattle, crops, slaves, purchases of land, inspection of family properties, experiments with fertilizers and seed, building and repairs, grafting of fruit trees — all the customary activities of an eighteenth-century Virginia plantation from seedtime to harvest.

Late fall and open weather in winter meant fox hunting and visits to Williamsburg and neighboring plantations; but entries on this score are few indeed. The journals are not entirely without color and human interest, but where these occur they are usually between the lines. It is a sober and factual account of his farming that Washington intended — a work of reference to which he could turn year after year to chart progress, to check and compare farm operations, to record plans and results. A purse race at Accatink or attendance at the theater in Alexandria (*The Inconstant, or Way to Win Him* was the play) receive less attention than the *accouchement* of a hound bitch named Lady, which “brought four Puppys, that is 3 dogs and a bitch distinguished by the following names, viz. that with the most black spots Vulcan, the other black spotted Dog Searcher, the Red Spotted Dog Rover, and the red spotted bitch Sweetlips.” The heroes and heroines of these journals are mares, ewes, bitches, sows, cows, rams, dogs, stallions; their mating and bringing forth, the journals’ most dramatic action.

George Washington was one of the most prolific writers of his time. His collected writings, including official papers, amount to thirty-three volumes. Not so far from illiteracy when he quit school in his teens, Washington later mastered an excellent prose. His journal, to be sure, is crudely written. Certainly it was not given to describing the beauties of nature, in the traditional fashion of country journalizing; nor did it introspect in mood and

sentiment. As a matter of fact, landscape and the *frémissements* and changes of temperature of the soul were just beginning to be perceived as literary material at this time. Rousseau's masterpiece *La Nouvelle Héloïse* was being written at Montmorency during the first year of Washington's longest residence at Mount Vernon. The real farmer — and George Washington was an authentic and exceedingly hard-headed one — is generally the last man in the world to ponder the beauties of nature and the state of his soul in relation to her. He cannot see the charm of a virginal spring landscape because of a fence in it whose posts are heaving badly, or because an apple orchard in it is blooming much too soon. Those sheep that make a living prospect of the high pasture may delight a poet, but all the farmer sees is that they are going to shear a pound lighter this year, maybe. And how slow the grass is greening, up there! Even on the seventh day it is difficult for a farmer, God-like, to view his creation. His farm is a harsh memorandum of things to do — of things that must be done at once!

George Washington's journals do not yearn upon summer hills that lean against a warm blue sky, that are golden with ripe wheat. They are quite barren of poetic observations. Nevertheless, he had a lively sense of beauty, color, form — the sense of art, even. How else explain the architecture, exterior and interior, of Mount Vernon and its landscaping? He pondered the fashionable works of his day on domestic architecture and landscape gardening; he had some good artisans from the Old World to advise him and execute his plans. Mount Vernon, as a whole, is a personal achievement and an evidence of the personal taste of its owner. It was remodelled and landscaped, for the most part, according to plans drafted by his own hand. It is almost as much his own creation as Monticello was Thomas Jefferson's. This

man of action and of large affairs, as stern a statesman and general as ever lived, was typically an eighteenth-century country gentleman in being an amateur of architecture, landscape gardening, and interior decoration. Most certainly not an æsthete, his amateur æsthetic sense was sound, self-confident, healthy.

George Washington's home was typically Hanoverian but it was the scene of a simpler and happier social and domestic life than its prototype in England or its contemporaries in the France of Louis Quinze. The easy morals and cynicism that were a legacy from the Restoration or the court of the Grand Monarch were not prevalent in Virginia. In Philadelphia and New York the tone of society and of family life was more European, often quite dissolute; but country life in Virginia, gay, self-indulgent, and on its masculine side anything but straitlaced, was deeply considerate of the stability of the family. Flirtation was a pastime among younger married persons, but adultery was ruled out. There was a virility in the Virginia husband that forbade complacency. No woman could afford to become a subject of scandal. The indifference of parents to children, a characteristic of seventeenth-century European society in its upper reaches, was not smart in eighteenth-century Virginia. Not in the least uxorious or sentimental about family life, George Washington was made susceptible to a marriage of convenience by an unhappy experience of romantic love and by having recently lived the life of a soldier, the least domestic imaginable. He had had a young man's fling, too (not the slightest doubt) at coarse and casual relationships with women. Still immature in many ways, he was emotionally well prepared for stable domestic life.

The character of Martha Washington has been so romanticized and stylized in the course of generations to fit the legend of a perfect Virginia *châtelaine* that it badly

needs restoring at the hands of a sympathetic and skilful biographer. More should be made of the fact that she was a handsome and charming woman as well as a discreet housewife. With her eyes wide open she seems to have shrewdly befriended the reputed grand passion of Washington's life, the coquette, Sally Fairfax. Martha Washington (it seems highly probable) knew her rival very well indeed. Washington's attachment to Sally Fairfax was, perhaps, an anchor of sorts, which kept his exceedingly sentimental nature from drifting farther from Mount Vernon than the Fairfax's Belvoir, where after marriage he was usually well chaperoned by Martha Washington and, so to say, by Sally Fairfax herself. Both women, it may be, each in her own way kept George Washington's affections from straying far. And, if his flesh strayed occasionally elsewhere, as some biographers insist, well, what of that? At least his mind, unlike the minds of such sniggerers, was not fatuously preoccupied with sex or concentrated on cheap and trivial aspects of it. If it was deployed sentimentally at times upon Belvoir, it was certainly well centered in his home and family at Mount Vernon. Always something of a fool for Sally Fairfax, he became more and more an affectionate, devoted, and self-exigent husband to Martha Washington, and a tender and protective father to her rather difficult son and her invalid daughter. The marriage of convenience, in any case, ripened into married love which in the long run made Washington's immature passion for Sally Fairfax seem to have been an unhappy adolescent survival, of no great consequence. Married love was cherished through forty long and often difficult years, through long separations of husband and wife, and until George Washington's death. Then the widow — prosaic nature as she is usually represented — became a romantic recluse in a poorly furnished attic room of Mount Vernon, into which only one

servant and the house cat were admitted, and from which (until she followed him there) the widow could view the tomb of her husband and lover.

Washington's last will and testament left to his dearly loved partner the use, profit, and benefit of his whole estate, real and personal, for her natural life; and, far in excess of legal requirements, it made her an executrix technically controlling the estate. The large property Martha Custis brought George Washington with marriage sadly depreciated during the Revolution and after. It was returned at his death more than five-fold in his legacies to her. The marriage had indeed been of very great convenience to both husband and wife, of great dignity and mutual devotion. If it was prose, then it was a serene classic prose of the first order with overtones of elegiac poetry at the last, as Martha Washington kept its memory alive in her attic chamber. The small, plump Virginia gentlewoman, with her keys at her waist, her perfect discretion and fidelity, remains much the more romantic figure of the two women Washington loved most in his life.

Mount Vernon, then, the scene of so much productive labor and good living, was the scene also of a simple drama of happy family life. There our first president, born an English colonial country gentleman, cultivated for so many years his orchards, gardens, and arable lands, leaving his plantation and his contented domesticity only to exercise an eighteenth-century squire's prerogatives in the political life of his people. Like his English cousins, George Washington went into public life booted and spurred. To the provincial capitals of the colonies and of the United States, he brought the manners of a Virginia planter, of a landed gentry who politely concealed their strong sense of superiority to the town. His campaigns and affairs of state, pregnant as they were with a new

nation, were, in a sense, merely interruptions in a busy planter's life. Ever homesick for Mount Vernon, as soldier or statesman, his center of gravity never shifted from the land to that of a professional military or political career. The trite citation of the Roman patriot Cincinnatus is nevertheless too apposite to pass over in writing of Washington, who almost literally left the plow and returned to it, having led and ruled his people through desperate circumstances to victory and a stable political life. But Washington's vocation was not politics or war; it was plantation life. His generalship and statesmanship were brilliant improvisations which did not seduce him from his true calling. He might have been crowned or endowed with dictatorial powers, had he chosen to be. But no present or promised power or glory could win him away from his first ambition — to farm and build up an estate in land.

As our civilization moves ponderously but precipitately through still another cycle of social revolution, now almost full circle with its great and petty despots and its disillusioned "ideologists," it is useful to recall that the founder of our nation was a hard-headed countryman who did not risk the jealousy of the gods for himself or his people. His political ambitions were temperate and mindful of the divine surveillance which, if it nods occasionally, sooner or later harshly punishes overweening power in the individual or the state. George Washington's will and energy exerted themselves unsparingly and triumphantly, but without arousing in him the insensate *libido dominandi* that has destroyed many a lesser and greater political figure and a whole people with him. Duty done, Washington returned to private life on the Potomac and resumed there, if only for a brief interval, the useful and contented life from which he had been called twice to lead the American people in war and in peace. The calum-

nies of the people and of their demagogues smarted under his thin skin for a time, but as he went about again among his farms, keeping pace with nature in the slow stride of the seasons, he found that his pride and his honor were intact. He was at home again among the realities that had developed his innate strength in youth: the growing of crops and the breeding of farm animals, the urgent and daily and all but hourly challenge of farm life to will and judgment. This hard urgency had been the moral alphabet of his early days on the Rappahannock and the Potomac. It had been his primary and secondary education in the very nature of things, until the war against the French and Indians gave him an even harder schooling in the element of struggle. It had fitted him very well indeed for the contests of full manhood, invigorating his will and instilling in him at the same time a deep humility that great personal power would not divest him of. The agrarian Republic that he founded, like Mount Vernon today, may be merely a beautiful and curious fossil amid the chaotic slag-heaps and the sterile cynicisms of urban-industrial America; but the legend of Washington grows with all the good legends of honor and courage and sagacity.





### III

## THOMAS JEFFERSON: PIEDMONT VILLA

When the author of an early canonical life of Thomas Jefferson, Henry S. Randall, visited the site of Jefferson's birthplace in 1851, all that was left of the old homestead was a cavity in a plowed field and remnants of building stone, fire-cracked and vitrified in the mold. Two locusts and two sycamores stood near-by, survivors of an avenue of them planted by Thomas Jefferson on his twenty-first birthday in 1764. Randall does not give an authority for his description of the vanished house, but it is entirely plausible that it had been, as he says, a frame building of an early Virginia type. It was, no doubt, one of those ample farm cottages of late medieval design, like George Washington's birthplace Wakefield, that continued to be built in English colonies in late Renaissance times. The house stood near a gap in the Southwest Mountains on gently rolling land near the Rivanna, a tributary of the James River. It commanded a delightful view, on the east and south, over a great rolling plain; on the west and north, as far as the uneven ridges of the Southwest Range. The nearest elevation south of the river was a densely wooded hill six hundred feet in height — a then nameless

little mountain of the Virginia back country that became known throughout the world as Monticello.

Jefferson's birthplace was called Shadwell. It was on one of the first steps that Virginia took up and over the mountains into Kentucky and the fertile valley of the Ohio. It was in frontier country, if not on the skirmish line of log cabins, corn-patch clearings, and hostile Indians. The savages no longer prowled menacingly in near-by forests, but companies of them from the backwoods occasionally trooped down the road past Shadwell to Williamsburg in their feathery regalia to parley with the authorities there. Up from Williamsburg over exceedingly bad roads in fine coaches came landed Tidewater men to view their holdings near Shadwell and on the remoter frontier of the Shenandoah Valley. Randolphs owned land across the river from Shadwell; and over the westward range, in the Great Valley, Lord Thomas Fairfax held great properties and lived on them much of the time in romantic isolation. It was through close friendship with William Randolph that Jefferson's father Peter was induced to buy land and settle in this Virginia borderland. Peter Jefferson married Jane Randolph, first cousin of William Randolph, whose estate at Tuckahoe on the James Peter managed for nearly ten years after William's death.

Thomas Jefferson, thus, was a strong hybrid of landed aristocratic and, on his father's side, of yeoman stock. Born in the Piedmont, he derived on the maternal side from the old Virginia plantation where keels from Bristol and London anchored or docked to take on cargoes of tobacco in the James River. Jefferson's boyhood on the Rivanna was spent in rural surroundings that resembled those of seventeenth-century Tidewater Virginia and partook also of wilderness life in environing virgin forest, trackless and full of game. He had only to paddle his

canoe across the Rivanna to lose himself in the deep woods of the little mountain that became Monticello — to wander there with his gun or, back against some great hardwood, to read in solitude one of the Greek or Roman classics his father urged upon him. The woods, the river, the farm, his father, and great books of antiquity were the influential environment of Thomas Jefferson's childhood and boyhood at Shadwell.

The well-born mother remains shadowy in all of his written reminiscences; his brothers likewise. But there was a sister, lost in first youth, who seems to have been a most congenial companion, a child with a sweet voice who sang old ballads on the banks of the Rivanna in the long twilights of Virginia summer. Jefferson accompanied her on his violin. In the human background, also and always, were the slaves with their sad or jubilant songs, and their abrupt, uncouth laughter. Their African wildness outdid the hardshell wildness of the pioneers and the tense, mute, wary wildness of the Indians.

This quasi-frontier boyhood at Shadwell was preceded by seven years of plantation life at Tuckahoe. Thomas Jefferson's earliest recollections were of this Randolph plantation on the upper James, topographically not of the Tidewater country but very much of it in the elegances and graces of its country life. Its very name, Tuckahoe, signifies the low country of Virginia. It is the Algonquin word for the floating arum of the lower James with which Tidewater tribes for years had supplemented their diet. Those who ate it were, by metonymy, lowlanders, and tuckahoes eventually came to mean European settlers. Later, white settlers of the higher lands of Virginia west of the Blue Ridge, were given the antonym of "cohee"; and all Virginia was divided, often with great hostility, between tuckahoes and cohees, between "the settlements" and "the back country." The friction and interaction of

these two regions, politically and socially, which had such vast influence upon American institutions for generations, began here in Virginia — mother of the first frontiers, earliest ancestress of the Old Northwest and the Old Southwest, of the Middle West, and the Far West.

Thomas Jefferson, in birth and early environment, was both tuckahoe and cohee. His boyhood and adolescence and young manhood, divided as they were between the back country of Shadwell and “settlement” Tuckahoe and Tidewater Williamsburg, where he entered William and Mary College at sixteen, gave him a mixed political and social background that fitted him very well indeed to lead the first stages of a transition of political power from the seaboard to the trans-Appalachian country. This transition was finally completed by Andrew Jackson, purely and *par excellence* a cohee. Jefferson’s background, however, was quite unmixed in one way: it was wholly rural and agrarian. His father, as we have said, was of good yeoman stock, his mother of one of the oldest landed families of the Tidewater, a family of large property and the highest social standing in Virginia, and of authentic noble blood. She was descended from the Earls of Murray in Scotland, and had been born in London during a visit of her parents there, in the parish of Shadwell, for which Peter Jefferson had named his Rivanna plantation. But for generations Jeffersons and Randolphs had lived on plantations or yeoman farms of the lower James, a region in Jefferson’s boyhood as empty of towns, villages, even hamlets, as the modern world has ever seen. Thomas Jefferson was an adult before he saw any residence of men large enough to be called, even as a compliment, a city — and the designation was no compliment in early Virginia.

Those fateful years from two to nine he spent at Tuckahoe upon a typical Virginia plantation of the old regime, patented in 1695 by William Randolph of Turkey Island

and left to his son Thomas, who built the Tuckahoe plantation house perhaps as early as 1712. It stands well preserved today, an unusual structure of two full stories, founded on brick in Flemish bond and built in the form of an H, in a belated Elizabethan domestic architectural style, similar in ground plan to the Lee mansion, Stratford, on the lower Potomac. Plain, homely even, compared with Stratford or William Byrd's Westover (built at about the same time), this Randolph country house near the Falls of the James was nevertheless large, spacious, high-ceilinged, and finished interiorly with detail of modest beauty, with fine floral carving and good panelling of pine and black walnut. Thomas Jefferson's childhood home here was in the best taste of early American domestic architecture in its first flowering. The feeling of wilderness plain living survived in its structure of great timbers and wood sheathing. The Middle Ages survived in the Gothic roof pitch and massive exterior chimneys — giving the small boy (already submitted natally to so many contrasts and conflicts of heritage and background) a mingling of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as his first memorable view of architecture.

William Byrd II, visiting Tuckahoe in 1732, tells how he entertained his host and guests by reading aloud *The Beggar's Opera*, which he had seen played recently in London. Conversation at Tuckahoe, on the edge of the wilderness, the elegant Byrd suggests, was quite as broad and vivacious and worldly as in the English capital. London manners, no doubt, had even richer echoes at Tuckahoe when young Thomas Jefferson began his education there, in a small schoolhouse on the premises. A late medieval manor house, with black slaves and white serfs, a jolly rural society with more than a tincture of Old World culture, fields, woods, a beautiful river, freshly arriving from the wilderness and flowing on grandly to

such elegant outposts of the Augustan Age of England as William Byrd's Westover — these contributed saliently to the environment of Thomas Jefferson in those years that lay the ground plan of the personality. When he returned to Shadwell, at nine, he had been bred a tuckahoe at Tuckahoe.

From ten to about sixteen he dwelt, also fatefully, in fresher fields on the edge of virgin forest, in a farm cottage of medievalish design, among plainer people and simpler ways — but always too with the great statesmen and poets and sages of ancient Greece and Rome. He read them during summer vacations in the cool of the forest, and received his formal education mostly from them in the near-by school of the Reverend James Maury, a sound classical scholar. One of the last wishes his father, Peter Jefferson, had expressed was that his eldest son should have a good education in the humanities, an advantage he himself had been denied. Thomas Jefferson was heard to say in later life that if he had had to choose between the pleasure derived from his classical education and the ample estate his father had left him, he would have chosen the former. He died with Homer and the Greek tragedies at his bedside.

It is impossible to imagine a Thomas Jefferson without his profound love of literature and its ultimate ripe fruits in Monticello and the University of Virginia. His early reading and his boyhood wanderings and musings upon the little mountain near Shadwell were the chief germinal influences of his mind and spirit. It was as if he had buried at the foot of some tree in the Monticello forest in his youth some Latin text of the great days of Rome, and the book had sprouted and grown at last into the fine Roman villa of his manhood. There in summer he continued his classical studies and pondered his Epictetus, Cicero, Seneca, Epicurus.

The influence of eighteenth-century French neo-classical learning and English or French political liberalism upon Thomas Jefferson has been found by authoritative scholarship to be slight.<sup>1</sup> His humanism was gained for the most part from the classics themselves, as his commonplace books plainly show. It was from the classics, too, that he derived directly his political philosophy and his Epicurean morality. Small wonder that the virgin soil of Monticello and of his own mind at last brought forth, not a Hanoverian country life like George Washington's, but a villa life strongly reminiscent of Rome in the days of Pliny the Younger — a life and architecture that renewed in America so freshly and naively the late summer of Roman culture.

Yes: Thomas Jefferson divested of the classics and of Monticello is well-nigh unimaginable. It is possible to imagine a Jefferson divested of his public life, however — a public life, to be sure, without which the history of the United States cannot be imagined. For Jefferson was the Platonic ideal of a great statesman: a philosopher, who with great reluctance and great ability assumed responsibility for the state. Read his many expressions of this reluctance and of his deep disgust with practical politics, and then accuse him, as enemies did and do, of having had a ravenous appetite for fame and power. Plainly he was innately disposed to the quiet life of a scholar or philosopher, and strongly indisposed to bear the "splendid torments," as he called them, of political honors, or to cope with the jealousies and rancors and malignant passions of politics. Fortunately for the American people he consented to endure the stress and tedium and the fatigues and calumnies of public life for many years. But Jefferson

<sup>1</sup> See Gilbert Chinard: *Thomas Jefferson: The Apostle of Americanism* (Boston: Little Brown and Company; 1939), 27. Also *Jefferson et les idéologues* by the same author (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press; 1925).

was not born a political animal. Extraordinarily skilful, often very cunning in practical politics, he brought to them unusual philosophical detachment and patient good will. With his temperament he could not have been one of our greatest statesmen if he had not been also a moral philosopher — that is to say, a practical philosopher — of the first order. His immense contribution to the founding of the Republic was made at huge cost to his love of tranquillity, of humane feeling, and the pleasures of the mind. It was an Epicurean privacy and calm that he preached and practised whenever respite from public life could be honorably enjoyed. It is very easy indeed to imagine his having lived his whole long life in the rural obscurity of an eighteenth-century country gentleman.

Like Washington, Thomas Jefferson is often wrongly believed to have lived most of his life away from his plantation. Washington, as we have seen, spent nearly thirty-three of his sixty-seven years at Mount Vernon; Jefferson spent nearly forty of his eighty-three at Shadwell, Monticello, or Poplar Forest. Certainly neither lived as long as he liked in the country, and their absences account in good measure for their not having made a prosperous living from the land. But Virginia plantation life formed them and was their chief joy and vocation in their adult years; and public life their immense *corvée*, magnificently performed for the state, bringing them great glory at huge cost. Jefferson's young manhood and his entire married life (1772-81) were spent in residence at Monticello or near-by Shadwell. While Vice-President under John Adams (1796-1800) he was able to spend most of his time on his plantation. In fact, it was only during the two terms of his presidency and during his sojourn of four years in Paris as peace envoy that he was unable to live a country life at Monticello. The last eighteen years of his life were lived there with hardly an absence, except when



he was at his refuge from public intrusion at Poplar Forest, a retreat near Lynchburg, where his peace and isolation were inviolable.

Jefferson's father's farm cottage at Shadwell burned to the ground in 1770, when Thomas Jefferson was twenty-seven years old. A site for Monticello had been levelled during his undergraduate days at William and Mary. In the spring of 1769 he planted an orchard near-by, and in the fall of that year he erected a brick story-and-a-half building containing only one room, which eventually became the southwestern pavilion of the mansion. When Shadwell burned he went to live in this small building. Here, too, he began his domestic life with Martha Wayles Skelton. Thus another young Virginia tobacco grower and wheat planter who would, like George Washington, serve two terms as President of the United States founded a very famous plantation home. The bride and groom arrived on horseback long after dark in a blizzard. The servants had turned in hours before. The little pavilion was cold and dark and without provisions of any kind except a shelf of books and a bottle of wine hidden behind them. The wine served bride and groom for supper and warmth. Song, merriment, and laughter came out of this legendary bottle as one of the deepest snows in the history of Albemarle County drifted over Monticello. Thus housekeeping and housewarming, such as they were, commence in the earliest habitable construction of what became Jefferson's famous Palladian villa.

The placing of this pavilion, according to Fiske Kimball,<sup>2</sup> really presupposes a general scheme for Monticello. It is safe to assume also, says Kimball, that it was not long before a part of the main house was built and

<sup>2</sup> Fiske Kimball: "Thomas Jefferson as Architect: Monticello and Shadwell" (Cambridge: *The Architectural Quarterly of Harvard University*, Volume II; 1914).

made habitable. From this time on, for many years, Jefferson was planning, replanning, building, rebuilding, decorating, and remodelling a home that, from the burning of Shadwell, centered his life for more than half a century. Rome was not built in a day, nor was this Roman villa at last completed until Jefferson's term as Vice-President — the only real sinecure of his life — gave him about four years' leisure to finish what he had begun in 1770 (or even earlier than that, perhaps, if one counts the levelling off of the site in his undergraduate days). In those times, apparently, the excitement, vanity, and luxury of building were not just a flash in the pan. A country gentleman and amateur architect sat down to it as to a banquet of many courses — unhurriedly, even lingeringly tasting every possibility an architectural drawing or Palladian or Vitruvian plate could offer an appetite for beauty and sound building. Jefferson, as we have said, had, with not many interruptions, about thirty years of this kind of enjoyment at Monticello. And when Monticello and Poplar Forest were finally completed, he moved on to an even greater feast: his planning and building of the University of Virginia.

The most famous example of American domestic architecture in our early Federal days, Monticello was, of course, of extraordinary influence upon the "Greek Revival." Curiously enough, it was a Roman building of Southern France — the *Maison-Carrée* of Nîmes — that first aroused Jefferson's architectural enthusiasm to the degree of a grand passion. "Jefferson's dithyrambs on the Roman monuments of southern France are well known," says Fiske Kimball. "He was not less enthusiastic over the contemporary effort to adapt the Roman style to modern domestic architecture. Rousseau's newly finished *Hôtel de Salm*, now the Palace of the Legion of Honor, attracted a scrutiny which was not without its later fruits. . . .

This marked preference for Roman forms Jefferson retained to the end of his life, and his views underwent no further essential modification. Like the French, he never turned to his books of Greek monuments for a prototype for anything more serious than a garden pavilion; he took no part in the Greek revival proper, which followed the Roman revival in America while he was still in full activity."

Jefferson had a strong dislike — a fine scorn even — of Georgian architecture in America and in England too. It is hard to account for the lengths to which this distaste went with him. Certainly not given to abuse, he roundly damned contemporary Georgian in Virginia and the mother country, saying of English Georgian: "English architecture is in the most wretched style I ever saw, not meaning to except America, where it is bad, nor even Virginia, where it is worse than in any other part of America which I have seen." Jefferson's habitual good command of his emotions breaks down when he praises or blames architectural styles. He writes in a letter to the Countess of Tesse from Nîmes in 1787: "Here I am gazing whole hours at the Maison Quarée, like a lover at his mistress. The stocking-weavers and silk-spinners around it consider me a hypochondriac Englishman about to write with a pistol the last chapter of his history."

When Thomas Jefferson reacted harshly, even churlishly, from the substantial and dignified Georgian of Tidewater Virginia he initiated, as we have noted, the Roman Revival that led into the Greek Revival. All this neo-classicism of the first half-century of the Republic, literary, architectural, political, and social, which introduced from ancient times nearly everything but the toga, was not the invention of Thomas Jefferson or was it his private importation from the Old World; it was the product of cultural weather prevailing generally in Europe and

America. But, in the United States, it was Jefferson's initiative more than that of any other American that made the fashion and the mood at last almost universal. Authorities have observed that Jefferson's classicism in architecture and political ideas was mainly a spontaneous one, that his four years in France merely deepened the insights of a largely self-taught classicist, whose academic grove had been the virgin forest of Monticello and the provincial campus of William and Mary. In the freshness and remoteness of Tidewater Williamsburg and Piedmont Shadwell and Monticello the Greco-Roman perennials sprang up once again. Asphodel transmuted to anemone in the American back country, and the nightingale to an Albemarle County mocking-bird, classicism sweetly adulterating itself with the backwoods romanticism of the New World.

Certainly Jefferson's landscaping of Monticello was romantic, not classic. One of his earliest plans for it was deliciously pre-romantic in the English manner of the earlier half of the eighteenth century: "choose out for a Burying place some unfrequented vale in the park, where is, 'no sound to break the stillness but a brook, that bubbling winds among the weeds; no mark of any human shape that had been there, unless the skeleton of some poor wretch, Who sought that place out to despair and die in.' let it be among antient and venerable oaks; intersperse some gloomy evergreens. the area circular, ab.<sup>t</sup> 60 f. diameter, encircled with an untrimmed hedge of cedar, or of stone wall with a holly hedge on it . . . in the center of it erect a small Gothic temple of antique appearance."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This Gothic temple, if it had been built, might have initiated still another architectural style popular in the first half of the nineteenth century in the United States. Fiske Kimball says of it in his *Thomas Jefferson as Architect*, *supra*: "His advanced position appears nowhere more clearly than in the garden pavilions, where his inclinations were unrestrained. Ridiculous as they may seem to us, these models — Roman, Gothic, Chi-

appropriate one half to the use of my own family, the other of strangers, servants, etc. . . . and proper inscriptions. the passage between the walls, 4 f. wide on the grave of a favorite and faithful servant might be a pyramid erected of rough rock-stone; the pedestal made plain to receive an inscription. let the exit . . . look on a small and distant part of the blue mountains. in the middle of the temple an altar, the sides of turf, the top of plain stone. very little light, perhaps none at all, save only the feeble ray of an half extinguished lamp."

At this point he interpolates an inscription for Jane Jefferson, the sister whose early death six years before had so sadly bereaved him:

*Ah! Joanna, puellarum optima!*  
*Ah! ævi virentis flore praerepta!*  
*Sit tibi terra lævis!*  
*Longe, longeque valet!*

Follow more Latin inscriptions, plans for statuary, and of course a grotto, spangled with translucent pebbles and beautiful shells. Alexander Pope's Twickenham retreat and Wheatley's *Observations on Modern Gardening* appear thus belatedly in this plan for a family cemetery at Monticello — a plan exhibiting Jefferson's lively visual imagination and his passion for mensuration and fine detail. The plan was not followed in such detail, of course, and its early romantic feeling was well disciplined in subsequent comprehensive plans for the landscaping of Monticello.

In any case, Jefferson's love of detail did not blind him to large effects either in architectural or landscape gar-

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nese, Greek — typified the widening conceptions of architecture which could look behind the unconscious tradition of the movement and recognize a variety of styles, historically ordained. . . . The Gothic model, however crudely it might have been executed, would have been the first work of the Gothic revival in this country."

dening. The mansion was placed to take in immense views as well as delightful small vistas. Three great valleys, the Blue Ridge twenty-five miles away, and the Ragged Mountains to the south were spectacularly spread before the porticoes of the villa. Let a professional description tell how skilfully Jefferson developed from his own sure taste and from knowledge of great English landscape gardeners of his time—Repton, Kent, Price, Gilpin, and Wheatley among them—his masterpiece of landscape architecture in the Virginia Piedmont:

“The house is located just far enough back from the point of the ridge summit to make way for a sweep of gently sloping lawn where a large party of people and their vehicles could gather, turn, and move about. This was made distinctly the entrance side of the house. The house main floor elevation was fixed at a point where its occupants could look over a lawn one hundred and ten feet wide and one hundred and fifteen feet long. From near its floor level, platforms extend east and west to the edge of the retaining wall that holds a part of the south lawn quadrangle in place. This retaining wall extends back to office building terminals on each side, beyond which the lawn surface merges into the natural slope. Along the face of the west part of the retaining wall was storage space. Along the face of the east part are the servants’ quarters, and to each of these apartments went passages from the house basement under the platform. At the ends of these platforms were outlook points from which are magnificent views, west, north, and east, into valleys and on to distant hills.

“From the point where the two roads through the woods [leading up to Monticello from the Rivanna level] meet near the south end of the lawn, the drive passed on a direct and level line, by the ivy-covered ruins of old buildings, then by the terraced kitchen garden on the

steep easterly slope at the right, and then on to the farm. . . . On the west of this entrance road as it passed the house, the terrace of the servants' quarters level was high enough up above the road so that activities thereon could be screened from visitors on foot or in vehicle by a low hedge.

"The sunny south lawn was the home lawn where Jefferson and his family were completely protected from the intrusion of visitors who might come in by the only entrance road.

"One of the most important of these landscape units was 'the valley five hundred feet deep,' the Charlottesville Valley, his 'sublime workhouse of nature.' . . . The beauty of this valley had so appealed to Mr. Jefferson, and his conception of the relation of building to landscape was so broad, that he must have had definitely in mind, during all these constructive years, the visual connection between his first love 'Monticello' and the University. . . . The westerly slope below the house and its south lawn were cleared of trees and laid in grass. This gave an unobstructed view of the University."<sup>4</sup>

Imagine the happiness of the man who thus could plan and see developing and extending through a long lifetime such a domain, where the delights of domestic life and, perhaps, the highest aspiration of his public career, the University of Virginia, were domiciled and gardened and embraced in a single view. The retired statesman and artist and sage thus was able to survey in the last years of his life the most gratifying achievements of sixty years of great endeavor. Did any man ever have such ripe and fine fruits of a lifetime thus exhibited to his aging eyes?

Jefferson's family life, to be sure, had been dealt time and again the very harshest strokes. First his young wife,

<sup>4</sup> From W. A. Lambeth and W. H. Manning: *Thomas Jefferson as an Architect*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; 1913).

only thirty-two when she died, was buried in the cemetery *à la mode* with such grief as must have made his romantic brooding upon death in his youth seem to have been very silly indeed. But he kept most of the children about him until they grew by marriage and births into almost a clan. Living at the time of his death were his daughter, Martha Randolph, eleven grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren. One of the most delightful pictures of the old age of Thomas Jefferson is of his attending their games on the south lawn and the terraces of Monticello, and his umpiring of their foot-races there amid shouts of triumph and protest, in spring and summer evenings. His letters to his daughters, written in Paris and New York and Philadelphia and Washington, document his strong family affections and his moral aspirations for them, expressed in the grave, stilted fashion of his time. The legend that he promised a dying wife never to remarry is entirely credible. Her death flung him into an hysterical grief entirely out of character with his philosophic temper. Many an attractive woman at home and abroad set her cap for this young widower with his marked domestic disposition, his good looks, his great reputation, and his ample estate. But the married love of his youth remained the chief love of his life. The cruelest loss of all his years, after his wife's early death, was that of the daughter who most resembled her in body, mind, and spirit, the daughter who had been growing into his principal human consolation for that earlier bereavement: Mary Jefferson Eppes.

The surviving daughter, Martha Randolph, however, at last took the place in his affections of the wife and the child who had so much resembled her, and became the mainstay of his emotions and domestic life. One of the last acts of his life was to compose a few lines of verse — "A Death-bed Adieu from Th. J. to M. R." — saying that the



last pang of death is his parting from her. This paternal tribute and the famous toast of crabbed John Randolph of Roanoke to Martha Jefferson Randolph, "To the sweetest woman in Virginia!" suggest her benevolence and charm.

This rich family life, in spite of its grievous losses, his virtuosity in architecture, his lifelong enjoyment of the classics, and his fathering of the University of Virginia were the principal joys of Thomas Jefferson's country life at Monticello — aside from his enthusiasm for agriculture and horticulture, which seems to have been uninterrupted even during his many long absences. Son of a planter and descendant of a long line of yeomen, Jefferson came honestly enough by his great love of farming. It was inborn and it was heightened philosophically by his intimate contacts and correspondence with the French *économistes*,<sup>5</sup> who even in their most rational moments seemed to regard husbandry with something like religious reverence. But these *économistes* and the French nature sentimentalists, so much in fashion during Jefferson's years in France, did not light this flame that burned so brightly for Jefferson his life long.

It would be easy to make up a huge fragrant bouquet of Jefferson's rural sentiments, his praise of the happy farmer and of country pleasures. He was only fifty when he wrote: "The motion of my blood no longer keeps time with the tumult of the world. It leads me to seek happiness in the lap and love of my family, in the society of my neighbors and my books, in the wholesome occupations of my farms and . . . in an interest or affection in every

<sup>5</sup> A French school of political and economic philosophers. They contested against what they considered the antiquated methods of the state in encouraging industry, and favored agriculture with an almost religious zeal. The school flourished from 1756 to 1776. François Quesnay, physician to Madame de Pompadour, was its founder and leader.

bud that opens, in every breath that blows around me, in an entire freedom of rest, of motion, of thought."

Jefferson had just resigned the Secretaryship of State under Washington, his strong distaste for politics, as he thought, deepened to a curative disgust. Let the Cæsarism of Alexander Hamilton or the spirit of Catiline, such as Aaron Burr's, thrive as it might in that bear's den. A year later he wrote to George Washington: "I return to farming with an ardor which I scarcely knew in my youth. . . ." To other correspondents he wrote that he lived on his horse from an early breakfast to a late dinner and very often after that until dark. He had returned to Monticello with an infinite appetite for country life, he said. He was determined to meddle in nothing outside its limits. "The little spice of ambition which I had in my younger days," he wrote to James Madison, who had taken him to task for retirement, "has long since evaporated, and I set still less store by posthumous than present name. . . . I am proceeding in my agricultural plans with a slow but sure step. To get under full way will require four or five years. But patience and perseverance will accomplish it. My little essay in red clover, the last year, has had the most encouraging success."

To Henry Knox, the Boston bookseller who became a Major General and then retired to a farm, Jefferson wrote: "have you become a farmer? is it not pleasanter than to be shut up within 4 walls and delving eternally with the pen? . . . I have proscribed newspapers. . . . my next reformation will be to allow neither pen, ink, nor paper to be kept on the farm. when I have accomplished this, I shall be in a fair way of indemnifying myself for the drudgery in which I have passed my life. if you are half as much delighted with the farm as I am, you bless your stars at your riddance from public cares."

To another friend he reiterated that his books, his family, and his farm furnished more than enough to occupy him the remainder of his life, and spoke of farming as that tranquil occupation most "analogous to his physical and moral constitution." As a matter of fact, he had not been altogether tranquil at Monticello when he had returned for this first brief respite from public life after the mission to France and the Secretaryship of State. He had confided to a French correspondent that he had found his estate sadly run down, in a condition that was really heartbreaking. His overseer was no exception to the rule about bailiffs: that their energies and honesty are not lessened by having the master on the estate. It would take several years, he thought, to redeem the sins of omission and commission of this sufficiently easy-going nature he had left in charge. And these years were not immediately forthcoming for Jefferson. Three years after his resignation from Washington's cabinet, he was elected Vice-President. Very enthusiastically he continued his farming and building every moment he could be at home. Absent, his mind kept veering to Monticello, especially in the spring when the first shad appeared on his table in Philadelphia and a faint greenish hue began to show in the willows.

During his two presidential terms Jefferson's estate was in very much better hands — the very capable and wholly honest ones of Edmund Bacon. With Jefferson's grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, who succeeded Bacon in the latter's declining years, Bacon was the best supervisor in Jefferson's long and sad experience of them. There was almost perfect rapport between the proprietor and the overseer, who seems to have loved and cared for Monticello as if it had been his own estate. But an absentee landlord can find no perfect surrogate. Bacon's devotion and alacrity and industry were — human nature and the feeling for property being what they are — by no means

equal to Jefferson's. When the oft-retiring statesman at last truly retired at sixty-five, there were many evidences at Monticello that he had been absent.

In January 1809 Jefferson wrote to Dupont de Nemours (one of the greatest of the *économistes*) that he was about to make port and turn the ship of state over to another navigator, his farmer neighbor, James Madison. "Within a few days I retire to my family, my books and farms; and having gained the harbor myself, I shall look on my friends still buffeting the storms with anxiety indeed, but not with envy. Never did a prisoner, released from his chains, feel such relief as I shall on shaking off the shackles of power. Nature intended me for the tranquil pursuits of science, by rendering them my supreme delight. But the enormities of the times in which I have lived, have forced me to take part in resisting them." This deep sigh of relief was even more vehemently expressed to Charles Wilson Peale, who was making love to a small farm. "I begin already to be much occupied in preparations for my departure to those scenes of rural retirement after which my soul is panting." To Baron Humboldt Jefferson announced that he was about to bury himself in the groves of Monticello and "become a mere spectator of the passing events." To Kosciusko, about a year later, he announced: "I am retired to Monticello where . . . I enjoy a repose to which I have been long a stranger. My mornings are devoted to correspondence. From breakfast to dinner, I am in my shops, my garden, or on horseback among my farms; from dinner to dark, I give to society and recreation with my neighbors and my friends; and from candle-light to early bedtime, I read. My health is perfect; and my strength considerably reinforced by the activity of the course I pursue; perhaps it is as great as usually falls to the lot of near sixty-seven years of age. I talk of plows and harrows, of seeding and

harvesting, with my neighbors, and of politics too, if they choose, with as little reserve as the rest of my fellow citizens, and feel, at length, the blessing of being free to say and do what I please, without being responsible to any mortal."

To Charles Wilson Peale again, in 1811, he said that he had often thought that if heaven had given him his choice of position and calling, it would have been on a rich spot of earth, well-watered and near a good market for productions of the garden, "some one always coming to perfection, the failure of one thing repaired by the success of another, and instead of one harvest a continued one throughout the year. Under a total want of demand except for our family table, I am still devoted to the garden. But although an old man, I am but a young gardener."

"When I first entered on the stage of public life (now twenty-four years ago)," Jefferson wrote an unidentified correspondent while Secretary of State, "I came to a resolution never . . . to wear any character other than that of a farmer." No one could accuse him of thus acting a part for political purposes. Born a farmer's son, he had himself been a farmer from youth and for many years of his manhood. It was not simply a question of owning vast tracts of farm land, with hundreds of acres under cultivation. In his early married life he had had a cash income, considerable for those days, from his farming — almost as much as his income from his legal practice, one of the most lucrative in Virginia. It seems highly probable that he might have kept his first resolution (of 1781) to retire and farm for a living almost exclusively, if his wife had not died. It was chiefly to distract himself from his grief that he consented to enter public life again. If he had established himself in private life as a planter, as he sincerely intended on retirement from the governorship of Virginia,

it seems certain that he would have made a good thing of his many farms. But his absences and the consequent ravages of his overseers injured his landed estate beyond repair, and, with many other unfortunate circumstances — such as the indebtedness of his wife's estate, the depreciation of money and of local land values, and his endorsing a friend's note for \$20,000 — brought him finally to ruin.

Like Washington, Thomas Jefferson, took too broad and impersonal a view of farming. He and Washington, in effect, ran two very expensive agricultural experiment stations. Both indulged in new methods that were for the most part untried in America — methods and policies that were eventually proven the best for American agriculture, but, in the experimental stages and on the scale performed, costly indeed. The practical farmer, like the practical politician, must have a ready talent for compromise, for improvisation, for meeting sudden emergencies. In their agricultural grand strategy, Washington and Jefferson were sound, far-seeing, even brilliant. Eventually their recommendation of diversified farming, with the principal cash crop shifted from tobacco to wheat, was generally followed in Virginia, thus saving the Virginia plantation from irremediable damage. But Mount Vernon and Monticello were vigorous and belated rear-guard actions against soil-exhaustion by tobacco and were not as successful as they might have been because their proprietors were absent so much of the time. By the time they returned to their estates in their sixties, bad management had worked irreparable injury. Moreover, these two greatest American farmers of their day were aging men when they found themselves at last free to devote all their time to agriculture. If they had been permitted to do so in their thirties instead of their sixties — as both so

strongly desired — they might have achieved for themselves and Virginia the changes so desperately needed in Virginia planting.

There was also a very lovable human weakness inherent in Virginia country life, from which Washington and Jefferson were by no means exempt. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that both — in the delightful manner of their Virginia hospitality — were all but eaten out of house and home by friends, relations, celebrities, curiosity seekers, polite vagrants, lazy slaves, and rascally overseers. The sheer good nature and lavish generosity of the planter and, it must be admitted, his ingenuous pride in dispensing hospitality contributed generously to the ruin of many a famous plantation of the Tidewater and the Piedmont. This open-handedness had been abetted for generations by the fluctuating and often illusory wealth of tobacco planting. The great Virginia families in many cases handed on through primogeniture beautiful homes, elegantly furnished, great stables of fine horses, good barns and cattle and equipment, but with them progressively increasing indebtedness. From generation to generation the habit of living sumptuously and often beyond their means grew into a fine tradition and a ruinous one. By the time the planter began to see the light and to wean himself of tobacco growing, to adopt a more diversified farming and shorten sail fiscally, it was usually too late. Washington and Jefferson, among the first to make agricultural reforms in a conspicuous way, were nevertheless unable — the force of pride and custom was so strong — to reform the habit of wining and dining and lodging all comers and of feeding and bedding down their equipages for as long as the visitor and his family and his slaves and his horse-flesh chose to stay. Both were careful, even shrewd managers when resident on their estates. Even in their many long absences they kept a remarkably close surveillance

of the details of farm management. The volume and the minuteness of the farm accounts of Jefferson and Washington, kept in their own handwriting and ciphering, are simply incredible. In them the cents, almost the mills, and the pounds and the shillings and the pence, are forced to confess themselves in the smallest detail. But when it came to defending themselves against any plausible guest who rolled up unannounced at the portico in a coach overflowing with family or relations, these otherwise fairly hard-headed men were almost as easy as a sailor in port.

Monticello was, perhaps, a more horrible example of this fine virtue of hospitality run riot than Mount Vernon. There are records of as many as fifty guests for one night, and it should be recalled that many of these guests brought Negro servants and horses to consume additional vast amounts of food and feed.<sup>6</sup> Yet the custom of entertaining up to the limit of one's means and often well beyond it was so sacrosanct in Virginia that there is hardly a sigh or a repressed groan recorded from Washington or Jefferson on its account. Once, to be sure, Washington requested his housekeeper not to open the better vintages for the unintroduced, sometimes even unidentified persons who flocked to Mount Vernon's hospitality. Jefferson at last had to absent himself from Monticello in the season when visitors came in cavalcades. It was an active protest against dispensing hospitality as a sacred institution that

<sup>6</sup> "Mrs. Randolph, who always lived with Mr. Jefferson after his return from Washington, and kept house for him, was very often greatly perplexed to entertain them [the guests]. I have known her many and many a time to have every bed in the house full, and she would send to my wife and borrow all her beds — she has six spare beds — to accommodate her visitors. I finally told the servant who had charge of the stable, to only give the visitors' horses half allowance. Somehow or other Mr. Jefferson heard of this; I never could tell how, unless it was through some of the visitors' servants. He countermanded my orders." Quoting Edmund Bacon in: Hamilton Pierson: *Jefferson at Monticello* (New York: Charles Scribner; 1862), 120.



led to his establishing a retreat in Bedford County, the fourth country place with which his life from birth to senescence is identified — Poplar Forest.

Shadwell bore him, Tuckahoe and Shadwell reared him, Monticello gave him the full, happy, villa life of his manhood, and Poplar Forest sheltered him in his last years against the benevolent despotism of social life in Virginia (to which had been added the vulgar and harsh tyranny of public intrusion suffered by most retired presidents). To this delightful retreat of Poplar Forest, which was inviolable as the south lawn of Monticello by no means was, he withdrew more and more often for longer and longer sojourns in the last twenty years of his life.

At Poplar Forest, the aging and aged Thomas Jefferson continued to indulge his passion for building and his taste for solitude, becoming a philosopher — an avocation which he had not had many opportunities to cultivate since his boyhood on the Rivanna. He had licked his wounds at Poplar Forest in 1781, when a motion for his impeachment as Governor of Virginia had come to nothing in the Assembly but had visited upon him one of the most painful humiliations of his career. There and then, in a two-room cottage on the four thousand acres which had come to him through his marriage nine years before, he wrote his famous *Notes on Virginia*, a masterpiece of poetic description and statistics which promptly brought him fame in Paris and London. There he received consolation for his first rough handling by politicians. Here also, late in the second term of his presidency, he escaped occasionally from this same hardy species and began to build his octagon brick house with its formal portico of slender Roman Doric columns.

At Poplar Forest Jefferson enjoyed seclusion from society but was never deprived of the superior social life that good books afford. He kept a petit-format library in

four cases, each between three and four feet in width and height — his collection of the smallest books obtainable which he had made for his convenience at Washington: one hundred volumes of English, French, Italian, Greek, and Latin poets, and also much of his favorite prose. These classic works and the society of his grand-daughters, with rare visits from neighbors, gave him a long-desired privacy in old age, congenially peopled with the quick and the dead.

Thus in his declining years Jefferson began to hide his life, as Epicurus recommends, conversing in books with the greatest minds of antiquity, beholding the extension of his own brief existence in his children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and often pondering, no doubt, the Epicurean consolation: "In life death is not. In death we are not." In modern times has there ever been an old age more assimilated to the ripeness of the sages of Greece and Rome than Thomas Jefferson's?

In his later years at Monticello and Poplar Forest, the imitation of Christ was added to that of Epicurus — the edification and consolation of a historical Jesus, at least. The professing Epicurean materialist, without recantation, became, like so many Romans of the fourth century, susceptible to the crowning moral wisdom of ancient times. This genuinely good man, in the spirit of the great Stoics, Epicureans, and Christians, at Poplar Forest entered into the evening calm of a wise old age.

Alas, the besetting virtue of Virginia brought tragedy to this sagest of Virginia planters and statesmen in his last days. His lavish hospitality at Monticello and the fine code of refusing nothing of an ample store to friend, neighbor, kin, dictated that he sign a \$20,000 note for a friend. The friend's default — an entirely honorable one — brought down upon Jefferson and his family the heavy structure of an estate that had not been designed as sol-

idly as the Roman villa at Monticello. Jefferson sat sadly but stoically among the ruins, exerting himself in every way to restore the shattered structure for his heirs. The news of his great misfortune brought aid from many quarters. He accepted it gladly and with great dignity. For a time it seemed sufficient to shore up his estate, and Jefferson died with the merciful illusion that his heirs were well cared for. But in a few years much of his personal property was sold for debt. His lands were sold as soon as a bad market improved ever so little. His daughter was turned out of her home. Monticello, three years after his death, was sold for three thousand dollars! Later in the century this beautiful mansion served for a time as a storehouse for grain.

A culture that had been founded on slaves and tobacco and Hanoverian luxury, that belatedly attempted to free itself from the sot-weed and was on the point of freeing its slaves, was collapsing everywhere. In some Virginia counties population decreased by half in a decade or two. Landed property was fast going to the dogs. Not only Monticello fell into disuse and decay. Mount Vernon also was in a sad state of dilapidation for years. James Madison struggled in vain to avoid selling his slaves. Aging John Randolph of Roanoke was doggedly fighting off personal bankruptcy. But, as exhausted land and decaying mansions catastrophically declined in value, the price of slaves rose! A new, easy, and flimsy wealth was being sought over the mountains. Eli Whitney's cotton gin was making it profitable to breed slaves in ruined Virginia. Great gangs of them soon toiled under the new dispensation of the machine and mass production in the Kingdom of Cotton. The fallacy of the one-crop system and its indebtedness to tobacco factors at last was succeeded by one-crop cotton farming and indebtedness to bankers in New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans.

Washington and Jefferson had just begun the education of their people in diversified farming when Virginia suddenly stampeded into the Old Southwest to make big and easy money in cotton. The great days of the old Virginia plantation had ended.



#### IV

### ANDREW JACKSON: THE COTTON AND THE CORN

Among the earliest of the papers of Andrew Jackson in the Library of Congress is a recipe for feeding a fighting cock. It is entitled: "A Memorandum how to feed a cock before you him fight. Take and give him some Pickle Beaf Cut fine 3 times a Day and give him sweet Milk Instead of water to Drink give him Dry Indien Corn that hase been Dryn Up in smoke give him lighte wheat Bread Soked in sweet Milk feed him as Much as he Can Eat for Eaight Days." The recipe, dated March 22, 1779, is said not to be in Jackson's handwriting; but mere memorandum that it may be, and perhaps in another's hand, it heads most appropriately the literary remains of Andrew Jackson, seventh President of the United States.

For all the days of his life Andrew Jackson was a game cock of the most gallant description. He carried his great shock of ruddy hair high like a cock's comb and rushed in on his adversaries with the cock-bird's joy of combat in his heart. Moreover, he was always in the right, or so he was convinced to the degree of religious conviction. A good fight, in any case, hallowed his every cause, whether personal, political, or in defense of his family or clan. His predilection for horse-racing, for the cocking-main, for

duels, for feuds, and for war was of his very nature and in his blood; for he was pure bred of that most contentious of races, the Scotch-Irish — <sup>1</sup> of the Ulster breed, that is, whose hordes began to pour from the north of Ireland into North America early in the eighteenth century. They continued to arrive in mighty waves through the ports of Philadelphia and Charleston, South Carolina, until the Revolution stemmed their immigration and checked their impetuosity momentarily along the parapets of the Appalachians.

They had been straggling across the mountains singly or with fur traders and long hunters for many years, but it was not until the fighting was over — and who fought with greater determination and ferocity than they did in the American Revolution? — that again they swarmed westward, carrying the frontier to the Mississippi in a generation. Like his forebears, Andrew Jackson was a good family man: tender, benevolent, almost morbidly solicitous for the honor and health and happiness of his women and children and slaves (who loved him dearly and took comfort under his belligerent protection). He bowed and he strutted among his brood with eye ever alert for any menace to them or himself.

A Scotch-Irish American and a feudist at heart, Andrew Jackson was also by choice and instinct a farmer; especially a herdsman, whose flocks and breeding were his principal interest in husbandry. His stallions sired some

<sup>1</sup> "A paradoxical fact regarding the Scotch-Irish is that they are very little Scotch and much less Irish. That is to say, they do not belong mainly to the so-called Celtic race, but they are the most composite of all the people of the British Isles. They are called Scots because they live in Scotia, and they are called Irish because they moved to Ireland. Geography and not ethnology has given them their name. They are a mixed race through whose veins run the Celtic blood of the primitive Scot and Pict, the primitive Briton, the primitive Irish, but with a larger admixture of the later Norwegian, Dane, Saxon, and Angle." From John R. Commons: *Races and Immigrants in America* (New York: The Macmillan Company; 1930).

of the fastest horses in America in his time. If you bet on one of his horses or fighting chickens you had to give odds. He was a skilled grower of crops also. His cotton graded out with the best short staple grown in a day when Tennessee cotton won the highest awards in world competition. The day before he died — upright in his armchair, like old John Adams — he walked several hundred yards with a visitor to show him how well his cotton was growing. The worn body from which his unconquerable spirit took flight was buried amid wailing slaves as a Tennessee June was ripening his cotton and his corn.

Andrew Jackson's love of breeding and grazing is in nearly all men, is it not? A man with five generations of town life behind him stops his car to gaze raptly at a fine flock of dairy or beef cattle or sheep, because he has remembered the day when his folk were all graziers in Scotland, Palestine, the steppes, or on high Pamirian pastures. This pastoral memory was fresh and of well-nigh unbroken continuity in Andrew Jackson. Like his pugnacity and his warmth of family and clan feeling, his love of animal husbandry was deeply inbred and, no doubt, a trait at first hand from his immediate ancestry. Stronger than his love of the tilled field, it derived plausibly from generations of tending cattle and sheep by his ancestors. His grandfather, Hugh Jackson, to be sure, had been a storekeeper in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, at a time when the Scotch-Irish of Ulster were beginning to develop a talent for trade. But his father had been a small farmer in North Ireland and continued briefly to farm in the New World. Back of these sires were countless generations who had lived, in highland mist, a pastoral life of the most ancient design.

The Scotch of the Ulster plantation had hardly gone into trade with their flax and their wool and their native acumen before British mercantilism smothered in the

cradle their fast-growing prosperity, outraging their independence and initiative and all but starving them into emigration.<sup>2</sup> By the thousands they took their great energy and their grievances and their temporary impetuosity to America. There they settled mostly in frontier highland country (not unlike the Scotch borderlands their ancestors had left in the early seventeenth century for the northeast counties of Ireland). They made their way southward from Pennsylvania through the Shenandoah Valley and northward from Charleston, South Carolina, into the Piedmont, where spearheads of settlement were about to thrust over the Appalachians into the wilderness of Kentucky and Tennessee.

Andrew Jackson's father, Andrew Jackson, was one of the "Pennsylvania Irish," as the Scotch-Irish immigrants who landed in Philadelphia were sometimes called in the South. They were distinguished from those other Scotch-Irish who landed in Charleston by their superior judgment of land, due to their previous experience of land settlement in Pennsylvania. They seated themselves on the better alluvial soils, while the less experienced Charleston immigrants were apt to be shunted off onto thin soils at the head of watercourses.<sup>3</sup> The Pennsylvania

<sup>2</sup> "The first blow came in 1698, nearly one hundred years after their settlement [in the north of Ireland]. English manufacturers complained of Irish competition, and the Irish Parliament, a tool of the British crown, passed an act totally forbidding the exportation of Irish wool to any country save England. Their slowly growing linen industry was likewise discriminated against in later years." From John R. Commons: *Races and Immigrants in America*, *supra*.

<sup>3</sup> "The two streams of Ulstermen, the greater through Philadelphia, the lesser through Charleston, which poured into the Carolinas toward the middle of the century, quickly flooded the back country. The former occupied the Yadkin Valley and the region to the westward. The latter the Waxhaws and the Anson County region to the northwest. The first settlers were known as the 'Pennsylvania Irish,' because they had first settled in Pennsylvania after migrating from the north of Ireland; while those who came by way of Charleston were known as the 'Scotch-Irish.' The former, who had resided in Pennsylvania long enough to be good



Irish, so-called, were first drawn, in the Carolinas, to the valley of the Yadkin, while the Charleston arrivals usually settled in the Waxhaws and Anson County. Jackson's father, although he was Pennsylvania Irish, was an exception to this rule when he built his cabin in the Waxhaws. Here he cleared a few acres, raised his first crop of corn, and sickened and died a few months before Andrew Jackson was born.

Jackson's birthplace is still unknown, or at least still hotly disputed between North and South Carolina. Let the innocent bystander beware and choose scenically, not with any pretension to topographical precision, such a place of nativity as Jackson's first great biographer, James Parton, describes in the Waxhaws. It was nearly a century ago that Parton pictured his conjectured site:

"In a large field, near the edge of a wide, shallow ravine, on the plantation of Mr. W. J. Cureton, there is to be seen a great clump, or natural summer-house of Catawba grape vines. Some remains of old fruit trees near-by, and a spring a little way down the ravine, indicate that a human habitation once stood near this spot. It is a still and solitary place, away from the road, in a red, level region, where the young pines are in haste to cover the well-worn cotton fields, and man seems half inclined to let them do it, and move to Texas. Upon looking under the masses of grape vines, a heap of large stones showing traces of fire is discovered. These stones once formed the chimney and fire-place of the log-house wherein . . . Andrew Jackson was born."

Whether Jackson was born there or not, the look and the feeling of this solitary spot do very well for a scene of

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judges of land, shrewdly made their settlements along the rivers and creeks. The latter, new arrivals and less experienced, settled on thinner land towards the heads of creeks and water courses." From Archibald Henderson: *The Conquest of the Old Southwest* (New York: The Century Company; 1920).

his nativity. The red, deeply eroded soil of such Carolina back country, the poor, papery grasses, and the black-jack oak and loblolly pine thriving hardily but stuntedly on the tired soil furnish appropriate stage properties for the place where the young widow Jackson gave birth to a child who would become a great champion of the plain people, and one whose humble birth and rustic poverty are rivalled among the greater American presidents only by Abraham Lincoln's. Already in the year of Jackson's birth (1767) these frontier lands were being quickly impoverished. At least the scene of his schooling, only a few years later, suggests it. It was an "old field school," as the settlers called a log-cabin schoolhouse set in an abandoned plantation, on land that no longer profited the plow and the harrow. Sometimes the one-room cabin of the original settler, who had promptly exhausted the virgin soil, became the rude schoolhouse of the district.

Born and reared and schooled in a log cabin, Andrew Jackson's early life would seem to a European to have been passed in great poverty and squalor. But the poverty of the American log cabin, almost unimaginable to all but the poorest of the poor in the Old World, was a poverty wholly without shame in America. It was the common social condition of the frontier and it was pregnant with great hopes. It was a source of strong virtues dear to a new people, and a starting-line where thousands of rustic youths crouched awaiting the word "go." Its foundation logs and puncheons were set in free land, and it became an emblem that, standing alone, might have blazoned the agrarian Republic and its freeholds. Quartered with a game cock rampant, a race horse courant, and a cotton plant "fleury," it certainly may not be left out of an imagined coat-of-arms of Andrew Jackson, our first president born in this primitive shelter.

It was in a log cabin, too — in the bend of the Cumber-

land River — that Andrew Jackson courted a frontier sweetheart, and it was in such literal rusticity of rough logs that he began his married life in Tennessee. He was still living in such a rude shelter at the beginning of his brilliant military and political career. Jackson's early land speculations in Tennessee had afforded him at Hunter's Hill, near Nashville, the magnificence of a frame house with clapboard sheathing. But bad commercial paper accepted in Philadelphia for good Tennessee land brought the young man back to the log cabin again. In 1804, when he was forced to sell Hunter's Hill, he moved to the site of his future mansion, the Hermitage, but the best his means could give him there for many years was a group of log houses — the largest of them, tradition has it, once a blockhouse refuge against Indians, measuring only 24 by 26 feet. This main building of the group was two stories high, with a lean-to addition containing two rooms, a pantry, and a bedroom under the sloping roof. On the first floor of the blockhouse there was one large room, at once parlor, dining-room, and kitchen. In this room of many functions all cooking was done in a vast open fireplace.

It was in such pristine domesticity that Jackson spent fifteen of the most active years of his early life, a farmer, storekeeper, land speculator, lawyer, judge, soldier, and politician, whose soldiering and politics very frequently took him away from the great hearth. This log house that had been a fort and its surrounding farm lands were the center of his life and the best he could show in the way of hospitality until his fifty-third year. Living here he had been a United States congressman and senator and a state judge, a Major General of the Tennessee militia and of the United States Army. It was from this rude home that he went to New Orleans, returning in 1815 not, as heretofore, a victor over Indian warriors and their chiefs and

allies, but triumphant over a small army of the best troops and generalship of the Old World.

Jackson was indeed a great popular hero in 1819 when he began building the present Hermitage. This did not take its final shape until he became President of the United States. A contemporary picture of the Hermitage in its first stage shows the familiar two-storied squarish farmhouse of the kind from which George Washington had reconstructed Mount Vernon. This first civilized habitation of Andrew Jackson's was modest enough for a man who had achieved high reputation at home and abroad. In fact, it aroused open contempt in Lafayette's secretary, Le Vasseur, in 1824, who said of it to a citizen of Nashville: "The majority of our generals, all our ministers, and even the greater part of our subaltern administrators, would think themselves dishonored and would not dare to receive anyone at their houses if they only possessed such a residence as this of Jackson's" — adding to make his meaning plain, "and the modest dwellings of your illustrious chiefs of the revolution, Washington, John Adams, Jefferson, would only inspire them with contempt and disgust."

Nevertheless, in frontier terms Jackson was cutting high, wide, and fancy when he commenced this solid brick home that in time would burgeon, with the Greek Revival, into the Hermitage as we see it today. Not to break too abruptly his line of communications with the domestic architecture of his youth and his early manhood, Jackson retained at least one of the original log houses of his first residence at the Hermitage. But with cotton sometimes at thirty-four cents a pound in the price flurries after the War of 1812, Jackson, a born farmer and skilled cotton-grower, could at last afford to replace logs with bricks. Post-war prosperity, as always, ended in financial hysteria and breakdown. But Jackson weathered these inevitable

hard times rather better than those which came in the backwash of the Revolution, forcing him to sell Hunter's Hill. No one could point a finger of shame at him or his substantial new home and call it Jackson's Folly. It held to the original name of the plantation it had been built upon — the Hermitage.<sup>4</sup>

The name "Hermitage" for a home in the country was as popular, not to say trite, by 1819 as it had been modish in the middle and later eighteenth century. Every thronged rural home of fame and celebrity then had been named to suggest the isolation and peace which its owner and occasional indweller could thus at least titularly possess: *La Solitude*, *Sans Souci*, *L'Ermitage*, *et al.*, were all very old favorites going out of fashion in the Old World by this time. *La Bastide* was another such title in fashion in France in the eighteenth century, its original meaning being "blockhouse." (The designation survived from pioneer days of Roman advance into Gaul.) If Jackson had chosen this name for his place, it would have been literally descriptive of his first residence there. But it was a title by no means descriptive that he chose, or, some say, received with the site. Certainly "Hermitage" was a misnomer for a home that, from its earliest days, was thronged with guests.

Lafayette and his ill-bred secretary Le Vasseur, who visited the Hermitage when it was not five years old, were only two of many hundreds, perhaps thousands, entertained there in the course of years by the General,

<sup>4</sup> "There is a theory (although it is nothing more than a theory) that he borrowed the name from Jeremy Bentham's estate in England. Students of Jackson's political beliefs feel that he was strongly influenced by the great English philosopher and jurist, whose home was called the Hermitage. He read Bentham's works and corresponded with him; it is not unlikely that when it came to selecting a name for his new plantation he thought of Bentham's home, the Hermitage, and adopted the name for his own use." From Stanley F. Horn: *The Hermitage* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie; 1937), 18.

President of the United States, and retired statesman and still-active politician. During his public life and retirement Jackson groaned deeply now and again in his letters over this ceaseless invasion of his privacy; but he was not, of course, much given to shrinking from the consequences of a fame into which he had first come so brilliantly at New Orleans. If he often got too much of this good thing, still it was a good thing to be famous and frequented. The thin-skinned Jefferson and the touchy and testy John Adams might sincerely subscribe, after years of public life, to fashionable eighteenth-century sentiments in favor of rural quietude and solitude, but with Jackson such sentiments were present only in the name of his highly populated country home. Politics at times turned his stomach, but Jackson the man and the natural human being dearly loved fame and frequentation, and much of the time apparently could put up with them in almost any degree or frequency.

But, when this first version of the Hermitage was built in 1819, Jackson had had for years other occupations than politics and the dispensing of hospitality. For nearly fifteen years he had been growing wool, cotton, corn, oats, wheat, beef, poultry, mutton, and an ample supply of vegetables in large kitchen gardens. He had "made" good crops, as they said in the region. He had also been proprietor of a general store, where for a time (tradition has it) he and his wife served the trade. But the tending of this store, and later of two others in the Nashville Basin, had been mostly in the none too capable hands of his partners. A great variety of goods was dispensed in them. Many of the items were bartered stock which he obtained from Philadelphia purchasers of his frontier lands. These goods he disposed of at barter, too, in exchange for local cotton and other farm produce of the neighborhood, selling such produce in turn for cash to brokers in Nashville,

Natchez, and New Orleans. The main store at Clover Bottom, like his earliest residence at the Hermitage property, was probably an abandoned blockhouse, once a grateful refuge against Indians. Here broadcloth sold for five dollars a yard, and calico and blankets at about three times the purchase price in distant Philadelphia — difficult, hazardous, and expensive transportation well justifying the high mark-up. On sale also were salt, grindstones, gunpowder, cowbells, and other miscellaneous and standard hardware. Payment was usually made in cotton, ginned or unginned, wheat, corn, tobacco, pork, skins, and furs.

At Clover Bottom Jackson was interested also in a tavern, a boat yard, a racetrack, and stables. Something like a contemporary country amusement park seems to have flourished there at the confluence of the Cumberland and the Stone Rivers. The boat yard and store helped to furnish and fit out the ill-fated and dubious expedition of Aaron Burr, whose grandiose plans for conquering Mexico and making himself head of a new empire in the West were, perhaps, not guessed by Jackson. Otherwise Clover Bottom seems to have been a venture that catered to nothing more out of the way than assembling at fairly regular intervals those of the Nashville region who liked to get their blood up at a racetrack with good Tennessee whisky and equally stiff betting. It was on this course that the famous race between Andrew Jackson's great Truxton and the Dickinsons' Ploughboy resulted in Jackson killing Charles Dickinson in a duel. Jackson's passion for horse-racing and his hair-trigger combativeness cost him in this feud a measure of unpopularity it took years to live down.

The affray and its tragic consequences, however, blew over, like many another affair of honor in the back country — and many another indiscretion, peccadillo, scandal,

or slander of Andrew Jackson's most stormy career. High-flyer, indeed, Jackson had a way of always landing on his feet. The storekeeping and other ventures at Clover Bottom sold out at a loss in the long run, but the planting of cotton and corn and the grazing and breeding of farm animals and race-horses went on profitably and assiduously while Jackson was at home or abroad. For his wife, Rachel Jackson, was an excellent manager: tireless, patient, shrewd, resourceful. While Judge Jackson was away on the circuit, or while he was generalizing his backwoods forces or detachments of the United States Army or representing his people as United States congressman or senator, Rachel Jackson, like Abigail Adams, ruled the roost with a much evenner temper than her husband's and, perhaps, with equal energy and sagacity.

When he began building the Hermitage, Jackson's military campaigns had so undermined his health that he had few years to live, or so he sincerely believed (and so it seemed to physicians). He professed to be building this home for a wife soon to be a widow. He invited Rachel Jackson to choose a site for a home that presently would become her dower. But it was the good wife herself who would not live to see the Hermitage in its ultimate glory of Corinthian columns and hand-painted wallpaper and great beds as dark and lofty as catafalques; while her phthisical husband, ever disregarding his health, lived on to the edge of eighty, mourning her for many years in the house where, Jackson believed, she was to survive him. Rachel Jackson, nevertheless, enjoyed a full decade in the substantial new house. It was perhaps of a kind she had left behind her in Virginia. She was a pretty twelve-year-old girl when her father, country gentleman, burgess, and iron-monger there, ventured for his own good reasons onto the Cumberland frontier (arriving after a melo-



dramatic flatboat voyage down the Tennessee and up the Cumberland rivers). His account of this voyage is a classic of American pioneering.<sup>5</sup>

It was in a log-cabin settlement near Nashville that Jackson found his Rachel, the young, childless wife of a violent husband she had been forced to leave. Jackson took her under his chivalrous protection, courted her, and began with her a married life that was technically adulterous. The first husband had not divorced her, as she and Jackson believed, but had merely obtained permission from the Virginia legislature to sue for divorce. It was this anomalous "marriage" that was thrown in her face again and again by malicious persons of the region and through the malignancy of Jackson's political enemies. Such slander at last resulted, almost literally, in her death of a broken heart. Thus Rachel Jackson was involuntarily sacrificed upon the altar of Jackson's high fortunes, victim of his first presidential campaign. There can be no doubt that he would gladly have lived in obscurity in his block-house home all of his days if he could have kept by him this warm-hearted woman whom he loved above all mortals and all earthly things. Wildly contrasted as they may be, the relic of their first primitive home standing on the Hermitage estate today and the Doric temple of love where the remains of Jackson and his wife are entombed near-by are the two most dramatic remembrances of a frontier idyll that the foul tongue of slanderers turned to tragedy.

The idyll of the log fort, nevertheless, continued for ten years in the new Hermitage. The large kitchen, the smoke-house, the springhouse, the dairy, the lawns and flower gardens, and the roomy brick dwelling were a greatly

<sup>5</sup> *Journal of a Voyage, intended by God's Permission, in the good boat Adventure, from Patrick Henry on Holston river to the French Salt Springs on Cumberland river, kept by John Donaldson, 1779-1780.*

enhanced domain of brisk, pleasant domesticity for Rachel Jackson. She may be pictured here as a bustling, good-tempered, handsome middle-aged woman, stout, swarthy, and with fine dark eyes — an exceedingly competent manager of her sizable establishment, her social and worldly limitations made negligible by her goodness of heart and her cheery and strenuous home management, her tact and skill. The responsibilities of such a southern household have been described again and again, but let us pause once more to consider how much had to be ever under the eye of such a plantation wife: nearly all victualling, cleaning, clothing, hygiene, entertainment, and moral supervision of a household numbering men, women, and children by the score. The management of a small hotel — and not such a very small one at that — is perhaps the nearest measure in present terms of Rachel Jackson's cares at the Hermitage the last ten years of her life.

Such were her duties and such, therefore, her pleasure and content; for she was utterly conscientious and eager for responsibility, a woman of deep kindness and genuine piety, serving her household and her evangelical God with all her heart and soul. She was unpretentious to the degree of humility, yet spirited and merry and outgiving in company, keeping to herself for the most part the lugubrious views of sin and salvation which characterized her religious feelings. Jackson built her a chapel near the mansion, where, under the overwrought emotional ministrations of backwoods preachers, she could freely express her sentiments as to the briefness and darkness of human life and her hopes of heaven. Yet there was nothing austere or canting in her nature, not a hint of priggishness or self-righteousness. Rachel Jackson spontaneously forgave her enemies and did good to those who hated her, or thought they did — that is to say, those who did not know her and those who chose for personal or political reasons

to slander her foully. For everyone who knew her, high, low, good, bad — New Orleans snobs, rustic neighbors, the foolish and the wise — promptly took the measure of her profound decency and honor, felt the genuine warmth of her social being, and dearly loved her. One must dissent with regret from an opinion held by some of her admirers that she was a woman with worldly graces and *savoir-faire*. These qualities seem to have been lost in her removal from Virginia to the frontier in her girlhood. Rachel Jackson's graces and *savoir-faire* were of a finer kind, a higher order. She was of an aristocracy rare in all times and all places, of the very highest *noblesse*, those who see God because they are pure in heart.

The new house that Andrew Jackson built for this really good wife is said to be reliably pictured in the background of an early portrait of Jackson. With its double gable-end chimneys and squarish solidity and air of comfort it could easily pass for a small planter's home on the upper James toward 1750, built by a prospering but by no means affluent tobacco-grower. Surrounded by dense shrubbery and backed by an apple orchard, it appears a very roomy and snug country house. Its second story is an ample half-story under the eaves. Distinctly less high than the first, at any rate, its scantness was remedied many years later when the Hermitage, second version, burned, and the original second story was lifted to a more dignified height under a flat roof. The roof of the first version is gabled and has a long slope suggesting much inward cosiness, giving it a cottage charm in spite of ample dimensions. A rustic demeanor, in fact, survived in this commodious brick building, as it no doubt also survived in the middle-aged couple who had lived in a log cabin most of their lives. This is distinctly a prospering farm home, as the later, completed Hermitage is the home of a country gentleman or well-to-do planter. And all that is

known about the domestic life of the Jacksons here fits the atmosphere of peace and embowered comfort suggested.

But no period of Andrew Jackson's life was without cyclonic weather. It was, of course, in his nature to be continually embroiled with personal and political enemies when it was not his fate to be engaged in actual warfare. The scant ten years that preceded his first presidential campaign, however, and the death of Rachel Jackson almost immediately afterward, were probably the most peaceful of Jackson's contentious, feuding, and warring seventy-eight years. Appointed Governor of Florida in 1821, he was again ferociously embroiled with politicians. In that year, however, he resigned from the United States Army and relinquished the governorship of Florida and, still active in local and national politics, began to live with fewer combative incidents the life of a Tennessee cotton grower and breeder of blooded racehorses.

The background of his life, like that of the portrait which furnishes a sketch of his home, was broadly and deeply of the farm and of a happy domesticity in which he recruited his strength for public life. Moreover, at home on the farm he was as gentle as the dove of peace which flew so wide of his embattled career. His agitations and passions necessarily invaded the bosom of his family at times. He is pictured as breaking off a description of some enemies, highly ornamented with savage frontier oaths, to say grace at his wife's prompting, only to take up his wild denunciation after a brisk "Amen." He is pictured also as giving refuge in foul weather to a strayed lamb at the fireside, at the request of a child, all his irascibility calmed as the child and the lamb took comfort in his lap by the hearth. His wife's amiability and her sincere godliness often reduced the pitch of his nerves, disarmed him as no finesse or aggression of an opponent

could do. No one, in his family life, could have been more susceptible to the appeal of weakness and need. His home and his pocketbook were always wide open to impecunious relatives and friends. No fewer than seven wards were either educated at his expense, fully supported at times, or made members of his household — among them an Indian boy rescued from the Creek battlefield of Tallushatches in 1813. Jackson's indulgence of his adopted son, Andrew Jackson, Jr. as the latter's follies were reflected for years in duns and the reports of overseers, is well-nigh incredible, taken with the impatience and irritability for which the foster-father was famous.

If it was a despotic wilfulness that Andrew Jackson exercised in politics, it was patriarchal benevolence that characterized his rule at the Hermitage. He expressed freely there a kindness which life from his earliest years had taught him to keep under cover of brusqueness or belligerence. And it was a patriarchal style of living that made it possible for him to care for so many who were unable — from hard circumstances or moral indisposition — to take care of themselves. For Jackson, as he came up in the world, progressed from the status of small planter to that of almost a lord and despot, all the while deriving the greater part of his living from a well-organized and well-managed agriculture. He was an exceedingly capable man of affairs, large and small — brilliant in his high-handed management of men in politics and war, and steady, acute, thorough in his building up of a landed estate. Even the constant undermining of this estate by his adopted son, which went on for so many years, was not too much for his resourcefulness. At his death he is reputed to have been worth about \$150,000, a sizable fortune for his day and for a man who had given so much to public life without having public money stick to his fingers.

Rachel Jackson's talent for household and farm management contributed very importantly indeed to the founding of his fortunes as landlord and farmer. Her piety and good nature seem not in the least to have detracted from her ability to get the work of the plantation done on time, and well done. She was one of those really clever executives who know how to be urgent in precisely the right degree and the right way with the right person at the right time. Under her husband's direction, and at times quite independently, her energy and judgment managed a plantation that produced, as we have noted, virtually everything consumed on the place. All food except sugar, coffee, and condiments came from the soil of the Hermitage. Something like five yards of cloth a day were woven from wool sheared from a home flock of about a hundred sheep. Under her management at times were a home tannery from which all shoe-leather for the slaves derived, a gristmill, a syrup mill, a blacksmith shop, a cotton gin, a distillery, a brewery, a dairy, a smokehouse, large stables and orchards, cotton planting, grain growing, and scores of field and domestic slaves.

One of the most difficult problems of management for Andrew Jackson and his wife was the overseer — who, if honest and amenable, usually drank to excess, and if a moderate drinker, was often given to speculation and recalcitrance. Nevertheless, in good years and bad, a great many human beings got fed and clothed who, without promotion and direction and moderate spurring, might very well have been half naked and famished. The slaves, by definition, were unfree, but the master and mistress of the Hermitage too were unfree to neglect their well-being and the happiness of all who lived there.

Visit the Hermitage today and, if you can, leave with an impression that life as it was lived there more than a century ago was in any important respect deprived or un-

lovely. Certainly no scientific proof can be adduced from the beautiful empty shell that existence there was well-rounded, secure, and happy for most persons concerned in it. But there are echoes plainly to be heard at the Hermitage of a degree of harmony that no longer exists in the relations of man and wife, and master and man — or for that matter in the counterpoint of social life as a whole. The tiresome slur that to dwell on these echoes is merely sentimental and debilitating cannot dismiss an entirely healthy desire to praise an order of things that certainly functioned with less friction than any present one does or promises to do unless human nature is again consulted as successfully as it was at Mount Vernon, Monticello, or the Hermitage.

The errors of old Virginia — its speculation and specialization in tobacco, its putting itself at the mercy of the London broker, its erection of an extravagant standard of living in good times which became ruinous in bad ones, its exhaustion of the soil by a greedy crop — all these fatal errors emigrated to much of the new country southwest of the Appalachians and were sadly repeated, with ginned cotton replacing tobacco as villain. But Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson, endeavoring as they did to diversify their farming, achieved greater security and stability on their plantations than the majority of planters in their day. They were not only more humane than most, they were sounder in basic agricultural practices.

Andrew Jackson, as a farmer and planter, from the earliest days of his farming tied his agricultural fortunes to cotton. But he maintained a base of diversification sufficient to weather many severe depressions in the price of cotton, his cash crop. Throughout nearly fifty years of farming he maintained his large family and his many slaves (numbering at one time about one hundred and

fifty) in great comfort. Land speculation, no doubt, aided him in building up his estate, and land sales at times kept his head above water. But it is not recorded that, when hard times came a-knocking at the door of the old plantation, he — or Washington or Jefferson, for that matter — ever sold Negroes to save his estate.

A farm inventory of January 1823 — four years after he built his first substantial home at the Hermitage — shows a rather modest equipment of tools and agricultural machinery (such as it was in those days), but indicates a shrewd holding to diversification. His census of cows, calves, oxen, sheep, lambs, and hogs is well maintained. There is no record of feed on hand to indicate the size of his self-maintaining crops for the previous year, but it is well known that he grew virtually all such provender — hay, wheat, corn, oats, etc. — seldom sacrificing acres needed to grow it to the speculative cash crop of cotton. An impetuous man in all things and a born gambler, he seems never to have staked the basic crop lands of the plantation. He “gambled” on cotton itself and on fighting chickens and on racehorses, and won, more often than not, on all of them. But the living of his patriarchal unit, obtained so largely from the land, was never jeopardized. He kept himself at all times out of an indebtedness to the cotton broker that might have imperilled his independence or his estate. Andrew Jackson’s modest wealth seems never to have been of this precarious kind. He had a born farmer’s pessimism and need to feel ample reserves in hand, and a born farmer’s saving tendency to regard all men as clever rascals until they proved themselves otherwise. Moreover, the New Orleans broker who marketed his cotton for years was well chosen, and seems to have been an honorable man and a fair dealer in all respects.

Jackson, as we have noted, was much less fortunate in



his overseers, who were incompetent and dishonest in various degrees and permutations and combinations. They and his adopted son, who represented the President of the United States so feebly and flightily at the Hermitage during his long absences, were mostly vexation and moral liability. They were a thorn in his side that he became painfully aware of whenever he turned for a moment from the crushing responsibilities of high office to consider his living. What they did or failed to do was of vast importance to Jackson as a private man and head of a large family. The vicissitudes of politics had been as familiar to Jackson from early manhood as the hazards of farming, but he knew that the former were more likely to bring a man to the poorhouse than the latter. Jackson's farming was not primarily an anchor to windward, a refuge from the stormy blasts of political life. It was, as with Washington, the vocation which he had elected and pursued from youth and held to continuously into old age. It would be a great exaggeration to say that he took his public life in his stride; but it is a statistical fact that his active military career was only eight years long and his presidential career was of about the same length. On the other hand, he was a farmer from 1792 until his death in 1845. In other words, out of fifty-three years during which, present or absent, he farmed several farms in the Nashville basin, only sixteen years were shared with a strenuous public life that kept him away — much of the time — from his crops and his cattle. Plainly his husbandry was not merely insurance against the casualties and changes of office-holding. It was his life and his living. And when he was away from it, he was more solicitous of its health and well-being than when he was in residence at the Hermitage. He was adept, no doubt, at reading between the lines of his son's or his overseer's reports on Hermitage affairs. His replies are shrewd, patient, firm,

with only an occasional outburst of anger (and then, chiefly, on account of suspected abuse of his slaves).

"Deare Sir," an overseer named Holtzclaw wrote Jackson in October 1833, during the latter's second term, "your Mares and Colts and work Horses and Mules and cows and Ox and Hogs and Sheeps and Caffs and Stud are all well and fate. I have 86 hogs to kill *only*. I have 7 Beffes to kill. . . . I have all of my Shoes and Socks and Stockings made and Nit and making up the Winter Close."

The President, of course, could quickly evaluate our italicized word. The pork supply for the winter would have to be supplemented by purchase. Why was it insufficient?

As for the cotton crop, Holtzclaw reported naively and no doubt with his hand heavy on the scales: "You wish to know about your crope of Cotton how moch I have Out. I will Tell you. I have One Hundred Thoson and I *think* we have out in the field yet 60 or 70 Thosan or 90" (he screws up his courage to add). "I was plaged a gratele abought Our gin, I *jist beginning* to gin. *dont be unesy* I will do the best I Can." The italics are mine, to bring out invisible ink in the reports. But to palliate this obscure man's procrastinations and disingenuousness, let us add that a first-rate overseer in the Nashville region at this time was glad to receive from \$350 to \$500 a year with perquisites. No wonder that many an overseer eked this out in various ways — in snoozing in quarters, if not in perquisites unmentioned in the contract.

In spite of his many absences and the defaults and rascalities of his surrogates at the Hermitage, however, Jackson performed a miracle for an absentee landlord — he made the plantation pay. There is little doubt that, in this respect and in the long run, he was much more successful than Washington and Jefferson. And Jackson's farming was in better order and more profitable at the

time of his death — if his estate had always been much smaller — than either Mount Vernon or Monticello when these two great planters gave up the ghost.

Jackson “made” good crops, as his neighbors said. He was a skilful and conservative farmer, and did not go in for experimental agriculture to any great extent. It has been stated, though, that it was the frivolous and sporting side of his nature that produced much of his income for many years. Like Washington and Jefferson, Andrew Jackson was a devotee of fine horseflesh. He is often pictured and sculptured as the man on the horse — which he was, in the literal and figurative meanings of the phrase. He rose to the highest political power as a war hero, and was much of his life in the saddle, in peace or in war. Cervantes says that the seat on a horse makes gentlemen of some and grooms of others. Andrew Jackson, raw country youth from the Carolina back country, discovered among the horsemen of Charleston (as they did simultaneously) that he was a gentleman. At the Charleston races he bet and lost like one, and ever afterwards carried his head high in the company of the highest breeding of the South. While he was being ridiculed as a “red neck” by his political enemies, his fine manners and poise and chivalry were praised by European noblemen.

The early careers of Adams, Jefferson, and Jackson (who rode the judge’s circuit for years on horseback) would of course have been impossible without the saddle-horse. This capable and beautiful animal, it should be recalled, was with water the only means of transportation in the colonies and the federated states of the early Republic. And how could the farmer have earned his living without the power of the horse, mule, or ox hitched to plow, drag, harrow, wagon, or stone-boat? It was indeed a very poor man in our early days who did not have a nag of some sort, and it was an undistinguished family that did

not have a few thoroughbreds in the stable. After man himself, the next best measure of social position in those days was the horse. You could guess from the way a man carried himself how many pedigreed or baseborn animals he owned, with further deductions of a worldly kind. From early youth Andrew Jackson was an owner and breeder of thoroughbreds.<sup>6</sup>

Jackson had arrived on the Tennessee frontier mounted on one blooded horse and leading another. He had not lived there long before he and other like-minded horsemen had organized a rustic jockey club and race-track at Clover Bottom. Spectators there viewed the sport of kings from a rise of ground over the bottom-land. Jackson founded his stud on the best horse he could buy in Virginia — the great Truxton, a beautiful bay, full of bone and muscle, got by the imported Diomed out of the thoroughbred Nancy Coleman. It has been stated that he made more money out of Truxton than any other single piece of property he ever owned — a plausible statement if one considers that Truxton was never beaten in the two-mile while in his prime and was sire to more than four hundred colts that made turf history. Breeders came from afar to buy brood mares and stallions of Truxton's line. It was an etymological "chivalry" that engaged Jackson in mortal combat with Charles Dickinson, their duel having arisen from misunderstandings over a race be-

<sup>6</sup> "In the southern States . . . the horse is used chiefly for the saddle; there being a *servile class* of quadrupeds, mules . . . to perform more laborious work. The consequence is that the qualities prized in the horse are those that fit him to bear his master along with grace, spirit and speed; the qualities that are summed up in the expression, thoroughbred. At an early day, then, we find the Tennesseans devoting great attention to the rearing of high-bred horses — a business afterwards stimulated by their passion for the turf. Soon after Jackson left the bench (July 24, 1804), he set off for a tour of Virginia . . . for the sole purpose of procuring the most perfect horse in the country. The far-famed Truxton was the result of this journey." From James Parton: *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Mason Brothers; 1861), Volume I, 247.

tween Truxton and Dickinson's Ploughboy. Chivalry of a derived meaning of the word also entered into this tragic affair — chivalrous defense of the good name of Rachel Jackson, incidentally aspersed by Dickinson.

Alas, the hypocrisies of presidential campaigns made it expedient for Andrew Jackson to divorce himself not only from the racetrack but also from the training of racehorses at the Hermitage. He continued to breed his fast colts on the home grounds but gave over their training to others — most reluctantly, one may well believe, giving in to political advisers who knew the strength of prejudice on these grounds. No public man in our annals was ever less of a hypocrite than Andrew Jackson. But horse-racing and cock-fighting, such was public sentiment in his time, simply had to go while he ran for President of the United States or held the office. Nevertheless, from the day he rode into a battle of the American Revolution, a boy on a pony, until in senescence he could no longer throw a leg over a horse, Andrew Jackson was a mounted man whose seat was the seat of a gentleman and warrior. In bronze today on his high horse on Capitol Hill in Nashville, the Scotch-Irish boy with the fighting heart and the saber scar on his cheek is still firm in the saddle.

Side by side in the neo-classic temple of love at the Hermitage lie the mortal remains of Andrew and Rachel Jackson. It is more than a century ago that his body was interred beside hers in this tomb. But their myth lives on in full force for Americans: the dearly beloved one of the rise to high place and power of humble folk, and of natural leadership among the plain people.



V

MARTIN VAN BUREN AT LINDENWALD

An editorial in the *New York Herald*, May 3, 1837, referred to Martin Van Buren, then eighth President of the United States, as "a common country lawyer who began life trundling cabbages to market in Kinderhook." There appears to have been a good deal of truth in this allegation. Martin Van Buren's father had a tavern in this old up-Hudson village, and credible tradition adds a small farm or truck garden. Tradition also pictures the eighth President in his boyhood as helping his father in the taproom and delivering home-grown vegetables to customers in the neighborhood. Certainly this was entirely honorable work for a boy in his day and circumstances, and of considerable educational value, giving him in childhood a chance to learn that making a living is three fourths of life, if not more. That boy may have reflected also that politics is at least one way of making it — perhaps a rather easier way than growing cabbages and serving food and drink to the public. For Martin Van Buren could observe that the farmers who frequented the taproom of his father's ordinary labored hard to make ends meet, while the politicians who sometimes mingled with them, but more often

drank their spirits separately in the back parlor, used their wits to better advantage than the farmers used their muscles. The boy seems to have taken a precocious and intelligent interest in political discussion and intrigue in the barroom and back parlor, and may very well have been keen enough at an early age to realize how capably the latter ruled the former — how easily a junto can rule the people.

The belated feudalism of the upper Hudson Valley was in only a fair state of health politically in Martin Van Buren's boyhood. But it showed few signs of the decadence that would overtake it soon and finish it off before the nineteenth century was a generation gone. The great landed families, as a matter of fact, up and down Hudson, still ruled under the protection of the Federalists. The Van Burens had once been something like villeins in this quasi-feudalism up the river. The first Van Buren had arrived from Holland in 1631, Cornelis Maessen Van Buermalsen, who was bound by a contract in return for food, shelter, clothing, and passage to America, to do the will of the Van Rensselaers for at least three years. This contract or indenture was honorably fulfilled in the given time, and thereafter the Dutch immigrant and his descendants farmed, probably as small freeholders, on the Kinderhook flats. They seem to have lived in humble status and unbroken obscurity for four generations, very much as the yeomen Adamses had in Braintree, but with less opportunity to rise in the world, because of the dominant "feudalism" of the region in which they settled. Caste was exceedingly rigid in the upper Hudson Valley in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, fully as much so as in Tidewater Virginia in those days. But in Martin Van Buren's youth both social and political climates changed utterly and the dominion of the Dutch landed men, from Manhattan Island to Schuyler Flats, weakened

and gave way to hardy newcomers. Few of the leaders of the new society were Dutch. Martin Van Buren, of pure Dutch blood and rearing, is almost unique among them in having risen to a degree of political power comparable to that of the old patroons.

Curiously enough, the full ripeness of the old Dutch hegemony was shown to be ready for plucking, early in the nineteenth century, by a young literary dilettante sojourning near Kinderhook in the comfortable Dutch farmhouse which Martin Van Buren one day would make his country retreat. This was Washington Irving, who may have put the finishing touches on his *Knickerbocker's History of New York* in the old Van Ness homestead a mile or so from Van Buren's native village in 1809. The good-tempered ridicule of the old Dutch traditions which Irving got ready for the press there dealt chiefly with the Dutch of Manhattan. It was, nevertheless, shocking lèse-majesté locally. The declining heirs of the up-Hudson patroons lived near-by. The southern outpost of the Van Rensselaers was in Clauverack, a few miles away. Albany, an hour or so by the stage, was still a Dutch town where fleshy burghers on stoops along the waterfront puffed their long pipes and broke their long silences only in Holland Dutch. English was rarely spoken in Albany or in the Dutch countryside up-Hudson. Irving's fun at the expense of these people in his farcical *History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809) made the Dutch of the Hudson Valley at once ridiculous and beloved in America and abroad and was, in a sense, the obituary of their long domination.

Martin Van Buren's lèse-majesté was of another sort. It was practical and political, not in the least literary. Wholly Dutch himself, as were most of the farmers and villagers of Kinderhook, very early in life he took sides



politically with the yeomen of his neighborhood in a movement which locally was to end in the anti-rent revolt, and nationally in the great rise of the common people under Jefferson and Jackson. Young Van Buren observed in his father's taproom how the people are ruled by the arts of the politician. He observed also, no doubt, that in a democracy most of the people rule some of the time, especially in a presidential election. At regular intervals they turn the rascals out. The youth Van Buren could also gauge political weather, and knew that the barometer was going down for the Hudson River aristocracy; for he placed himself early — even before he was a voter — among the political insurgents who were conspiring the overthrow of the Federalists and the patroons.<sup>1</sup> At fourteen he quit peddling cabbages and serving beer and schiedam in his father's bar and began the study of law in the office of Francis Silvester, an influential Kinderhook Federalist. Silvester was not annoyed, apparently, to have the boy who swept out the office and penned minor legal documents, staunchly of the opposite faction — even an admirer of Thomas Jefferson! There was nothing that Silvester could sniff in the political air or in this child's personality to warn him that his apprentice and menial would one day lead in a political world that had overthrown

<sup>1</sup> "Martin Van Buren had shown unusual sagacity as a politician. Born under conditions which might have disheartened one of different mould, bred in a country given up to federalism, and taught in the law for six years by an uncompromising follower of Hamilton, he nevertheless held steadfastly to the Jeffersonian faith of his father. Nor would he be moved in his fealty to the Clintons, although Van Ness, his distinguished law preceptor [in New York City after his apprenticeship to Silvester in Kinderhook] worshipped Burr. . . . As a very young man, Van Buren was able to see that the principles of Republicanism had established themselves in the minds of the great majority of the people interested in political life, and if he had been persuaded that Aaron Burr and his Federalist allies were to be restored to power in 1804, he was far too shrewd to be tempted by the prospects of such a coalition." From D. A. S. Alexander: *A Political History of the State of New York* (New York: Henry Holt & Company; 1906), Volume I, 207.

Silvester's own, and that this adolescent tavern-keeper's boy would at last lord it on the land of Kinderhook as a great nob who had been President of the United States.

The plain people of Kinderhook admired this smart boy as one of their own. If later he was given to dressing above his station, more like a Federalist's son than a local yeoman's, still he was affable and his manner was familiar. Even his greatest successes did not alienate him from them. When the King of Holland eventually granted Van Buren a coat-of-arms of the Counts Buren, which he displayed on the walls of his Kinderhook country home, he remained "Matty" Van Buren to his neighbors, and was never for a moment aloof from or ashamed of his origins. If he lived in grand style and sported armorial bearings, the Kinderhook democrats forgave him, perhaps secretly and vicariously shared in such glories. He was one of them who had risen above the great landed Federalist families. Let him wear this royal feather in his liberty cap if he must. Moreover the retired president was still in the vegetable business, growing excellent potatoes and also good hay at Lindenwald. If he was elegant in his dress, he was still at heart a Dutch farmer like most of his ancestors in America and Holland.

"His complexion was a bright blonde, and he dressed with the taste of Disraeli. Henry B. Stanton describes him as he appeared in church [in 1828]. . . . 'He wore an elegant snuff-colored broadcloth coat with a velvet collar; his cravat was orange with modest lace tips; his vest was of a pearl hue; his trousers were of white duck; his silk hose corresponded to the vest; his shoes were of morocco; his nicely fitting gloves were of yellow kid; his long-furred beaver hat, with broad brim, was of Quaker color.'"<sup>2</sup>

When Martin Van Buren's immigrant ancestor left the Low Countries in 1631, the Dutch were certainly the best

<sup>2</sup> From Alexander, *supra*, 365.

farmers and gardeners in Europe. Agriculture in the Dutch and Flemish states flourished as vigorously as commerce in a time of Dutch world supremacy in trade. Dutch cattle were the finest in the Old World. Even in the Middle Ages the cheeses of Edam had been famous. In horticulture, too, the seventeenth-century Dutch were world leaders; their orchards and truck gardens were horticultural perfection. They had invented the cold-frame and the hotbed. The Dutch plow and the Flemish method of cultivating turnips as a field crop were important contributions to the beginnings of "scientific" agriculture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Transplanted to the Dutch colonies in North America this cheerful and fecund farm life reproduced itself happily and productively in the Hudson Valley, as well as in the fertile back country of New York and New Jersey. No better farmers than the Dutch ever came to the American colonies, though the Rhenish Germans of Pennsylvania were their equals. The Dutch were the first settlers to grow European grains on a profitable commercial basis in America. They introduced the best foundation stock of horses and cattle. A tranquil and prosperous routine reigned on their farms and boweries up and down the long Hudson Valley. Autumn found their houses and barns well stocked with home-grown provender and food.

Washington Irving, mischievous caricaturist of the Dutch that he was, has best preserved the charm and feeling of peace and plenty of the old Dutch homestead up Hudson. He pictures immortally the background of Martin Van Buren's ancestry when he describes the Kinderhook farm of the Van Tassels in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Irving's reputed model for Baltus Van Tassel's homestead, the Van Alen farmhouse, erected in 1736, stands today a short stroll from Van Buren's Lindenwald.

"Old Baltus Van Tassel," Irving writes of this typical Dutch husbandman, "was a perfect picture of a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer. He seldom, it is true, sent either his eyes or his thoughts beyond the boundaries of his own farm; but within those everything was snug, happy, and well-conditioned. He was satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it; and piqued himself upon the hearty abundance, rather than the style in which he lived. His stronghold was situated on the banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks, in which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling. A great elm tree spread its broad branches over it; at the foot of which bubbled up a spring of the softest and sweetest water, in a little well, formed of a barrel; and then stole sparkling away through the grass, to a neighboring brook that babbled along among alders and dwarf willows. Hard by the farm-house was a vast barn, that might have served for a church; every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with the treasures of the farm; the flail was busily resounding in it from morning to night; swallows and martins skimmed twittering about the eaves; and rows of pigeons, some with one eye turned up, as if watching the weather, some with their heads under their wings, or buried in their bosoms, and others swelling, and cooing, and bowing about their dames, were enjoying the sunshine on the roof. Sleek unwieldy porkers were grunting in the repose and abundance of their pens; from whence sallied forth, now and then, troops of sucking pigs, as if to snuff the air. A stately squadron of snowy geese were riding in an adjoining pond, convoying whole fleets of ducks; regiments of turkeys were gobbling through the farm-yard, and guinea fowls fretting about it, like ill-tempered housewives, with their peevish, discontented cry. Before the barn door strutted the gallant cock, that pattern of a husband, a warrior, and a fine gentleman, clapping his

burnished wings, and crowing in the pride and gladness of his heart — sometimes tearing up the earth with his feet, and then generously calling his ever-hungry family of wives and children to enjoy the rich morsel which he had discovered."

As for the roomy farm cottage: "It was one of those spacious farm-houses, with high-ridged, but lowly-sloping roofs, built in the style handed down from the first Dutch settlers; the low projecting eaves formed a piazza along the front, capable of being closed up in bad weather. Under this were hung flails, harness, various utensils of husbandry, and nets for fishing in the neighboring river. Benches were built along the side for summer use; and a great spinning wheel at one end, and a churn at the other, showed the various uses to which this important porch might be devoted." In a hall which opened on this workshop porch, rows of resplendent pewter, ranged on a long dresser, dazzled the eyes. "In one corner stood a huge bag of wool ready to be spun; in another a quantity of linsey-woolsey just from the loom; ears of Indian corn, and strings of dried apples and peaches, hung in gay festoons along the walls, mingled with gaud of red peppers. A door left ajar gave a glimpse of "the best parlor, where the claw-footed chairs, and dark mahogany tables, shone like mirrors; and irons, with their accompanying shovel and tongs, glistened from their covert of asparagus tops; mock-oranges and conch-shells decorated the mantel-piece; strings of various colored birds' eggs were suspended above it; a great ostrich egg was hung from the center of the room, and a corner cupboard, knowingly left open, displayed immense treasures of old silver and well-mended china." It was in this state parlor that the farmer and his wife entertained their neighbors: "Old farmers, a spare leathern race, in homespun coats and breeches, blue stockings, huge shoes, and magnificent pewter

buckles. Their brisk, withered, little dames, in close crimped caps, long-waisted short gowns, homespun petticoats, with scissors and pincushions, and gay calico pockets on the outside. Buxom lasses, almost as antiquated as their mothers, excepting where a straw hat, a fine ribband, or perhaps a white frock, gave symptoms of city innovations. The sons, in short square-skirted coats with rows of stupendous brass buttons, and their hair generally queued in the fashion of the times, especially if they could procure an eel-skin for the purpose, it being esteemed throughout the country, as a potent nourisher of the hair."

Such was the rustic society that gathered around the Van Tassel tea-table in the great farm parlor when the crops were in. Such heaped-up platters of cakes of various and almost indescribable kinds as were set before the Van Tassel guests! The doughnut, the *oly koek*, the cruller, sweet cakes and short cakes, ginger cakes and honey cakes. There were slices of ham and smoked beef, dishes of preserved plums, peaches, pears, and quinces; shad and roast chicken, together with bowls of milk and cream — all mingled higgledy-piggledy, with a motherly teapot in the midst. As the guests fell to and helped themselves the sound of music issued from the hall, where an old Negro, the itinerant orchestra for more than half a century, scraped on a fiddle as old and battered as himself — accompanying every movement of the bow with a motion of his head, bowing almost to the ground, and stamping his foot whenever a fresh couple were to start.<sup>3</sup>

Thus old customs and a somewhat medieval farm economy persisted among Dutch farmers up-Hudson in Martin Van Buren's youth. When Washington Irving visited in the Van Ness home in 1809 he did not know Martin Van Buren. But William P. Van Ness had just put the final

<sup>3</sup> Quoted or paraphrased from Washington Irving: *The Sketch Book* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons; 1850-80).

polish on young Van Buren in his famous New York City law office and returned him to begin his political career as Surrogate of Columbia County. The work that Irving completed at the Van Ness place was about to deliver *him* from a long dull servitude to the law. In the region of Kinderhook — still quite as Dutch as Irving's humorous and poetic description suggests — the two young men were making trial of very different gifts that, one day, would bring them both world fame. Public reputation for both commenced here among the Dutch farmers — who served as constituents and clients of Van Buren, and effective literary "copy" for Irving. At the height of their careers Irving and Van Buren met and became close friends.<sup>4</sup> Both at last retired from public life to old Dutch farmhouses of the Hudson Valley, talented, amiable, clever men-of-the-world.

When Martin Van Buren retired to Lindenwald he was returning not only to his native Dutch group but also to farm land that had once been farmed by a Dutch ancestor. It was part of a tract of virgin soil purchased from the Indians and paid for in beaver skins and grain by a Jan Martense van Aelsteyn. This Van Alstyne (as the name became) was a great-great-grandfather of Martin Van Buren. The land remained in the Van Alstyne family until 1780, when it was sold to a Judge Peter Van Ness, a rising local politician who in 1797 built the brick Palladian mansion where Irving is said to have completed his history of New York and Van Buren spent his declining years.

In the summer of 1839 Smith Thompson Van Buren,

<sup>4</sup> Van Buren and Irving met in London in 1831 when Van Buren's appointment as Minister to England failed to be ratified by the Senate. Irving was Secretary of the United States Legation. Van Buren's humiliation at the hands of the Senate won him strong support and resulted in his being elected Vice-President under Jackson. Elected President in 1836, Van Buren presently offered Irving a place in his Cabinet as Secretary of the Navy. Irving declined.

the Democratic President's son, wrote to his brother Martin, Secretary to the President:

*My dear Mat,*

*The old man has just gone to Schenectady — and intends to bring up at the United States Hotel, tomorrow. I shall follow on this afternoon with the luggage. We have had a very pleasant time since I last wrote you. At Kinderhook we spent a day and dined at the Van Ness Place — Kleirood no more! We had a capital dinner of Fricasse and ham, washed down with champaigne. We tried hard to get up a good name; but it is very tough work. The present favorite is 'the Locusts' of which there are a great number about. The only objection is that the same name is used by Cooper in the 'Spy' for one of his places. . . .<sup>5</sup>*

This breezy note about the recently purchased Van Ness place, with its mention of fricassee, ham, and champagne, presaged many years of good living that were in store for Martin Van Buren on retirement from the presidency two years later. The dining-room and the broad central hall at Lindenwald, as the Van Ness place was at last renamed (how much more attractive and appropriate "Kleirood" would have been!) were to be the scene of much joviality of a more formal kind than Irving had attributed to the Van Alen farm down the road. In its abundance and variety it was a Dutch hospitality, but one that decidedly had seen the world and brought back to Kinderhook rituals and protocol of dining and wining unheard of in the Van Buren ordinary or the Van Alen farm parlor. Martin Van Buren was not penurious in the least, but he was a prudent and provident man. The lavish hos-

<sup>5</sup> As quoted in Louise Hardenbrook: "Martin Van Buren, Country Gentleman" in *The Bulletin of the Columbia County Historical Society*, Kinderhook, New York, April 1941.



pitality of Washington, Jefferson, or Jackson was beyond his means and above his style of living. (His living expenses for eight months of the year 1842 amounted to \$3,000, \$120 of which went for "wine and champagne.") He is said to have saved half of his presidential salary of \$25,000 and had an estate of about \$200,000, a large one for that day, when he retired in 1841. He was well able to entertain in the semi-official way of an ex-president who was playing politics in retirement. The large central hall of Lindenwald, eighteen feet wide and fifty feet long, became now and again a true banquet hall where party men of high influence and foreign visitors (often of great distinction) sat down with European formality to heavy dining. Hunters with dogs and guns, distracted from the chase by milkmaids in Rhenish vales, looked upon the ex-president's "state" dinners from the hand-painted European wallpaper of the large hall. Martin Van Buren is said to have enjoyed this polychrome paper of Jean Zuber (entitled *Paysage à Chasse*) because of its gay but heavy Dutch effects. The banquets likewise were gay and *hollandais*.

The Van Ness house, too, had been made very heavy, in the Italianate fashionable style, by the elder Upjohn, whom Martin Van Buren commissioned to "modernize" it in 1849. Eighteenth-century delicacy and elegance had been hidden as much as possible under a prodigious "Venetian" villa, the grace and good proportions of the Palladian farmhouse marred everywhere (exteriorly at least) by incongruous and ugly architectural detail and remodelling. An absurd loggia-ed tower rises haughtily above these defacements, accenting a fashion that was so very sure of itself in the forties and fifties of the last century, but now seems merely vulgar and pretentious.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Richard Upjohn, who remodelled the Van Ness house, was, of course, a first-rate architect. Among his principal works were: Trinity

Some of the original mantelpieces remain, their excellent manners overshadowed by the gloomily self-assertive black walnut furniture of the period. Two lodges, at either end of a semi-circular entrance drive, matched this *pompe funébre* before the remodelled house. A good early Federal portal was hidden in the shadows of an overbearing Victorian porch. It was as if the charming old Van Ness house had been entombed alive, or lay in state at official obsequies. And all these heavy and sombre disfigurements were entirely out of tune with the jolly and fairly unpretentious life that Martin Van Buren began to lead at Lindenwald upon retirement. He himself, always something of a dandy, was anything but pretentious as a host or householder. He had a ready, affable smile, gracious, responsive manners, and was entirely without stiffness or pomposity. And his style of living at Lindenwald, aside from Upjohn's architectural corruptions, was genial and simple. There were the semi-official dinners and the many hours of political intrigue, but for the most part Van Buren occupied himself with the

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Church, New York City; St. Paul's Church (now Cathedral), Buffalo, New York; St. Peter's Church, Albany, New York; the Chapel of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine; Christ Church and the Church of the Pilgrims, Brooklyn, New York. The pressure of fashion and of the client's desire to be in fashion must account for the desecration of so many early Federal and pre-Revolutionary houses by good architects at this time. Hawthorne's remodelling of the Alcott house in Concord to suit the mode for Italian villas is another horrible example. Some architects, according to Henry-Russell Hitchcock in *The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art; 1936) succeeded "in preserving in the Italian Villa style . . . a real mastery of occult balance in mass composition." Everard M. Upjohn, in *Richard Upjohn, Architect and Churchman* (New York: Columbia University Press; 1939), says: "The modification of 'Lindenwald,' . . . at Kinderhook, New York, was made at the same time [1849]. The change in character of a good colonial house cannot but be deplored by any lover of the older forms of American architecture. This work was interesting from two very different points of view: the fame and position of the owner proved valuable to the architect on the occasion of his trip abroad, and one of the oldest furnaces . . . was installed here, showing that it was just about this date that central heating began to appear."

pleasures of a country gentleman. He wasted no time in getting down to farming at Lindenwald, and his farming immediately became a most delightful avocation.

"I find my farm in excellent condition," he wrote Andrew Jackson, July 30, 1841, "crops good and promising, and hope to sell enough of it to pay the workmen in the garden and on the farm which is my ultimatum."

The ex-president seems not to have kept altogether clear of animal husbandry. Poultry and horses were considered indispensable to country living in those days. Oddly enough, in the old Roman fashion he supplied his table with fish — trout, pickerel, and perch — from two artificial ponds. But he did not engage in the risks and worries of livestock to any great extent. He could have wintered sizable herds, for hay was his main crop and a fairly large one. He chose rather to press it and sell it in New York City, where he marketed also most of his potato crop (second in importance at Lindenwald, and always of excellent quality). His potatoes commanded high prices wherever he sold them. His hay and potatoes were grown for the most part on land reclaimed from a large tract of bog. The orchards at Lindenwald were another very lively interest of the retired president's. He was skilled in horticulture and enjoyed the actual work of orcharding, sometimes planting, pruning, and cultivating with his own hands. His most personal concern on the farm was his orchard of pears, peaches, plums, and apples. His correspondence with other gentlemen farmers of the North and the South is full of enthusiastic comments about his fruit trees. He sold trees as well as fruit at top prices.

Two years after settling down at Lindenwald Van Buren wrote Jackson: "My farming operations for the present season [1843] have been very successful. I am just getting my farm in good order. My hay crop is, to

the surprise of those who could not or would not believe that I could turn my mind to the subject, larger than a single one of my neighbors." He had written Jackson earlier in the year that he had never been more zealously or agreeably engaged.

Both Martin Van Buren and Andrew Jackson were entirely free of any neo-classic affectation as to the joys of rural life in retirement. In their genuine liking of it, both took country life, farm life, plantation life more or less for granted, without sentimentally over-accenting rustic tastes or complacencies. They were, both of them, glad to be free of the crushing burdens of public life, but did not mind keeping a finger in the pie. Nor was either in the least coy about receiving public attention in retirement. Rococo sentiments of solitude and *Weltschmerz* in a garden close they did not affect at all. Lindenwald and the Hermitage were to be seen and their proprietors to be heard at any time by all duly authenticated persons. Living out of the world and enjoying to the full their bucolic pursuits, Van Buren and Jackson remained very much men-of-the-world and veteran politicians who would give advice on practical politics at the drop of a hat. Martin Van Buren, in fact, once more threw his hat in the ring in 1848 as the presidential candidate of the Free Soil party. There was no danger, as he well knew, that this sally from Lindenwald would return him to the White House. His candid stand against the extension of slavery years before had well cooked his goose. Moreover, he had probably had his fill of the cares and honors of office-holding. Since his thirtieth year, when he became State Senator, Van Buren had been Attorney-General of his state, United States Senator, Governor of New York, Secretary of State in Jackson's cabinet, Minister to England (tentatively and briefly), Vice-President, and President of the United States. Counting minor offices

not mentioned, he had been in politics all but a third of a century when he retired to Lindenwald.

There he could make the best of two worlds: the tranquil world of the country gentleman and the exciting one of unofficial political power. For as he grew potatoes and hay near Kinderhook, Martin Van Buren remained the chief emeritus of the great political machine he had built up so patiently and quietly in the course of long years. He had rowed with muffled oars to his high place in public life. With muffled oars he continued, in retirement, to row toward higher objectives for his party and his people. "The Red Fox of Kinderhook," as his enemies tagged him, the president who has gone down in history as perhaps the most wily, devious, and noncommittal of all, had as a matter of fact spoken with a candor that ruined his official political life. His unequivocal pronouncements against the extension of slavery were just the beginning of his attempt to lead his party to higher ground, to the level at which Lincoln at last cautiously arrived with a new party. Van Buren's intrigues in his country home near Kinderhook were certainly various but, in the main, they were of a far-seeing kind that could bide their time in defeat. When his place and influence in American political history are revalued, one day, he may perhaps be seen as one of the most courageous and persistent and level-headed enemies of slavery in our early annals. If his enmity to slavery began with a personal one toward John C. Calhoun, it certainly did not end there.

The year before he lost the Democratic nomination, chiefly because of his opposition to the annexation of Texas, he wrote to Andrew Jackson of his pleasure in country life and a growing indifference to active and practical politics. "I intended to have spent the winter in New York, but find the country so agreeable that I shall not go there before spring and then only for a short time.

. . . You have no idea of the interest I take in farming or the satisfaction I derive from it. The Whigs would hardly believe that a much larger portion of my time is taken up with devising ways and means to multiply the quantity and improve the quality of manure than in forming political plans."

The political reverses of 1844 and 1848 did not surprise or afflict him greatly. The charms of country living grew upon him progressively. After eight years at Lindenwald he said: "My taste for farming is not only unexhausted but greatly strengthened and my ability, I hope, improved. . . . Since I left you last spring I have been from my farm only 3 or 4 days upon visits. . . . I would not again trust my nerves by so near an approach to one of the seats of political and bank corruptions. Why cant you" — he is writing to General William Jenkins Worth — "decide upon becoming an honest and virtuous man and plant yourself in my neighborhood upon a good farm?" Later in the year, to Worth again, he stated: "I am head and heels in farming concerns and have pretty much made up my mind to spend the remainder of my days exclusively in the country."

Van Buren varied his country life with visits to New York and the South and spent two years abroad at Sorrento and in European travel of a sort that was a social triumph for a Kinderhook tavern-keeper's son. Several European monarchs received him and flattered him greatly — among them the King of Holland. This was an especially gratifying patronage for one toward whom the declining Dutch landed aristocracy of the Hudson Valley had not condescended socially in the very least.

Lindenwald never attained the snobbish prestige of the Schuyler or Van Rensselaer seats at Albany, but the son of a long line of up-Hudson *boers*, even in his defeat and retirement, was a political power to reckon with. The rem-

nants of Federalist power were glad to make a deal with him, whenever he condescended to them, through the Albany Regency. The slow turn of the wheel of fortune had lifted this child of small Dutch landholders, politically at least, high above the heirs of the patroons.

A man of the most affable disposition and fairly phlegmatic temper, in his fall from the highest office Van Buren did not attempt to identify his pastoral pleasures with country snobbery. Power and place he had taken in a fairly easy stride — amiable, clever, dapper politician that he was. It was with good Dutch realism and aplomb that he met his political reverses and settled down to enjoy rural life at Lindenwald in his sixtieth year. It is impossible to imagine his indulging in the disillusion and chagrin so common to more emotional magistrates whom the people or their political leaders have discarded. He is to be seen, rather, moving briskly and interestedly about his small estate, his orchards blooming or bearing profusely under his skilful care, his hay and potatoes piled high for market and fetching high prices, and his table covered with good food in great variety and quantity. He himself, the little, stout, bald Dutchman that the slim dandy had become, dispensed hospitality and shrewd political advice, ever well-poised and smiling, courteous and kind. Almost daily in good weather he rode his fine saddle-horse — gift of John Randolph of Roanoke — to the village of Kinderhook, pausing at a great roadside elm on the way to rest his mount and enjoy the landscape. Sometimes he cantered on a piebald pony as far as the Stanwix Hotel in Chatham Four Corners to gossip with the proprietor, an old crony of his. He is pictured in his declining years taking a constitutional on the crescent drive before his home arm-in-arm with two Irish domestics, pretty young girls who laughed without effort at his sallies and contributed their own wit to the occasion. His sallies were also re-

turned smartly and wittily by the major-domo of his household, the handsome, worldly son, "Prince John" Van Buren, upon whose shoulders the ex-president's mantle was descending.

Let an excerpt from his last will and testament testify also to his sane and deep enjoyment of twenty years of country life on ancestral lands in his native township.

"I, Martin Van Buren, of the town of Kinderhook, County of Columbia and State of New York, heretofore Governor of the State, and more recently President of the United States, *but for the last and happiest years of my life a farmer in my native town. . .*" (Italics mine.) It was thus that he began his legal bestowal of a comfortable estate upon his heirs and praised his lot — his rise from peddling cabbages, from the status of a common country lawyer to the highest political office and world fame. The happiest years of his life, nevertheless, were spent in retirement upon a hay and potato farm.

As this last will and testament was read, Abraham Lincoln ordered a salute of one hundred guns for Martin Van Buren in all the military posts of the United States. This formal and official courtesy may one day seem to have been a personal salute from one president to a forerunner in office and policy. For this cool, shrewd, matter-of-fact little Dutchman had forthrightly taken some of the first steps on the *via dolorosa* leading to Lincoln's own. On his Lindenwald acres he had sensed the fate and the issues many years before.





## VI

### WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON: OHIO ALLUVIAL

For those who take dark comfort in historical continuity — a continuity not unbrokenly sunny, certainly — it is moving to stand by some of the earliest tombs of the Harrisons in the small churchyard at Jamestown, Virginia. One of these weather-worn memorials is in the firm living grasp of a hundred-year-old sycamore in the deeply shaded plot back of the ruined church. It is all very Old World, very Thomas-Gray-elegiac — much more so than any churchyard in New England, where antiquity is somehow nearer and lighter and brighter among slate headstones behind a white frame spire or cupola. There, it is as if America had begun with the beginnings, as if the separatism of the founders had at once cut the cord and had, in the narrower shadows of this spare and graceful New England chapel, delivered itself from medieval solidity and gloom. The English colonials of New England were, to be sure, anything but light-hearted; but the immense weight of old European traditions had been lifted somewhat by their dissent and by the transatlantic crossing. They were in the way of becoming a new people in a new world, it seems, the very day they landed in the wilderness. At Jamestown, on the other hand, old England, church and state, disembarked with the settlers to be preserved for

generations without radical change. The headstones of the aboriginal New Englanders are of American Puritans or American Pilgrims. The tombs of the Harrisons in their Gothic shade at Jamestown are of English men and women, true colonials whose cultural allegiance had not been in the least strained or broken by the oceanic spaces put between them and the mother country. It was Virginia really that was *new* England in North America, not the American theocracy of Massachusetts Bay or the anarchistic congregation of Plymouth.

Not until Virginia crossed the Appalachians was this Old World cultural continuity definitely broken. William Henry Harrison, ninth President of the United States, was born in Tidewater Virginia, an English colonial. He became at last an American when he crossed the mountains — as American as any who ever boasted of birth in a frontier clearing. His genealogy, nativity, and career trace the course of Anglo-American civilization from its earliest beginnings at Jamestown through generations of Virginia planting into the first exuberant national self-consciousness along the Ohio and even farther west upon the Wabash. He was most strikingly the post-Revolutionary Virginia gentleman and younger son who left worn-out tobacco land on the lower James for virgin soil over the mountains, and found the puncheon floor of a log cabin in the Ohio Valley a springboard for new fortunes. With fortunes redeemed, moreover, he rose in the world, no longer recognizably an English colonial like his father, Benjamin Harrison the Signer, but wholly American, with something of the rustic and plebeian tone of Jackson and Lincoln. Without such a change of complexion — and it went deeper than that, it was a deep change of heart — he could never have been elected President of the United States. William Henry Harrison's Vice-President, John Tyler, born in the same Tidewater Virginia county as

himself, remained to his dying day more than half an English colonial in manners, views, and culture, and a very fine example of a Virginia gentleman of the eighteenth-century school. The effect of transmontane air on a Virginia pioneer in Ohio is most dramatically evidenced in William Henry Harrison, born with a gold spoon in his mouth in a fine Georgian manor, February 9, 1773.

Berkeley stands today, in a good state of preservation, an impressive pile of faded brick, plain and four-square exteriorly, but with a modest florescence of ornamented woodwork and mantel within. The Tidewater James at this point has suffered so few changes in general aspect that it is not difficult at all to imagine this scene of Harrison's birth and boyhood as it appeared in his time. There is still almost an acre of terrace and lawn sloping down to the river, a lovely prospect of turf, rose gardens, and the James, here nearly a mile wide. As at Brandon across the James, then seat of another branch of the Harrison family, it is the depth and breadth of view, the riverscape, and the elaborate landscape gardening that make the residence and its dependencies seem of a scale larger than the actual one. These surroundings greatly dignify the manor house, as do also its interior elegance and spaciousness. An ample style of life within afforded a dining-room gallery for musicians or innocent bystanders at the exceedingly convivial stag dinners of Benjamin Harrison the Signer. If the homespun and corn-fed supporters of William Henry Harrison for president had been familiar with these surroundings of his boyhood and early youth, they would have recalled, no doubt, that the devil is a gentleman and would have taken no chances on a gentleman's not being also a damned Federalist. Their candidate, in any case, was not born and reared in a log cabin as had been suggested for campaign purposes. He was of the most nearly patrician background an American of his time could

boast. His father was a great landlord, but lord of land no longer fit to support the large establishment it had once well supported. The immense acreage of a dozen plantations, far and wide along the James and Nottaway Rivers, was running down sadly; and the ship-building and carrying enterprises which Benjamin Harrison the Signer commenced at Berkeley before the Revolution were not prospering.

The Harrisons' gradual rise from fairly humble beginnings in Surry County in the seventeenth century had reached its peak when William Henry Harrison's grandfather, Benjamin the Fourth, had married a daughter of Robert ("King") Carter, called the richest native American of his day. Benjamin the Fourth had erected Berkeley in 1725-6. With Benjamin the Fifth, the Signer, tobacco planting was approaching its judgment day. His patriotic absences from the plantation at Philadelphia, its looting by the enemy, his ill health from hard work and high living — he died of the gout — all contributed generously to the decline of Berkeley. Inherited by William Henry Harrison's elder brother, Benjamin the Sixth, Berkeley at last became merely a very substantial burden of debt. The future president's boyhood was stirring with the dangerous political activities of his father, climaxed when the Signer took the Virginia militia in to the death at Yorktown (a short march from Berkeley). The luxurious living of the plantation carried on, no doubt, to the last moment of solvency, grandly and gallantly in the Virginia fashion. William Henry Harrison, as he read Latin and Greek with his tutor, canoed on the James, or shot catbirds in the cherry orchard, was a rich man's son in everything but real riches. These had been flowing away rapidly for a generation or more in the looted soil-fertility of the plantation. They had been packed into tobacco hogsheads and loaded on ships docked or anchored at the foot of the

Berkeley gardens. One of the most beautiful versions of country life in all history ended for Harrison with his youth at Berkeley, and for many another Tidewater tobacco planter's son with the close of the Revolution. Like many another, he considered various ways and means of remaining a Virginia gentleman; but like the most spirited of them, he did not consent to become *pauvre gentilhomme* on worn-out acres in Virginia, where his family had been lords for a century. He studied medicine in Richmond and Philadelphia, disliked it heartily after very short acquaintance, remembered the gentlemanly calling of arms which had filled his boyhood with such fine excitement, obtained a commission in the United States Army, and went over the mountains on foot with a small company of raw recruits for the Indian fighting along the Ohio.

When young Harrison, the ruined planter's son, went out to the Ohio country with an ensign's commission signed by George Washington, he was following in Washington's footsteps. But he did not suspect — for he was a very modest young man — that Indian fighting in the back country, like Washington's, might lead to successful generalship and at last to the presidency. This pioneering from Virginia was a Virginia tradition almost as old as that of planting tobacco, and was directly connected with it. In five generations tobacco had advanced up the James River to the fall line, thence through the Piedmont to leap the sterile mountains into Kentucky, leaving in its wake soil that would need many years of a rational agriculture to restore it.<sup>1</sup> The Indian country of the Ohio Valley, with its uplands north and south of *La Belle Rivière* was a happy hunting ground that rivalled the imagined Indian

<sup>1</sup> See Avery Odell Craven: *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860* (Urbana, Illinois: The University of Illinois: Studies in the Social Sciences, Vol. XIII, No. 1, March 1925).

Elysium. The savages fought for it inch by inch, as indeed they had fought for their fine game and corn lands in Virginia, teaching Indian agriculture and Indian guile and cruelty to colonials (who were very apt pupils). Two centuries of hard-fought retreat ended in final defeat for these aborigines at the hands of the candid and affable young Harrison, who had arrived with his sorry recruits at Fort Washington shortly before one of the last Indian victories — the routing of the veteran General St. Clair by the Miamis in 1791. Wholly demoralized survivors of this catastrophe poured into the Fort Washington stockade on the site of Cincinnati and forgot their defeat and its terrors in corn whisky. A few years later at Fallen Timbers Harrison participated in the action under Mad Anthony Wayne that paid off the Ohio Indians in fine style for the rout of St. Clair. Not many years later at Tippecanoe, William Henry Harrison himself gave the Indians of the Old Northwest something very close to a *coup de grâce*.

As subaltern and captain and general in this Indian fighting, as territorial representative from and governor of the Northwest and Indiana Territories, William Henry Harrison had experiences of success and authority that made him into a new man in a new land. The log cabin and the hard cider which, with the sobriquet "Tippecanoe," styled him a pioneer and Indian fighter in his presidential campaign, were not merely political effects and properties. The Virginia-born patrician had indeed undergone profound changes of personality, retaining the charm, easy manners, and self-restraint of the Tidewater gentleman, but alloying these traits strongly with the friendly ruggedness of the frontiersman and veteran. Apparently there was not a trace of *hauteur* surviving in his manner or even in his unconscious mind.

As for the sacred and symbolic log cabin, if Harrison had not been born in one — as nearly everyone supposed

he had been when he was elected president — he had at least begun his domestic life in this primitive shelter at North Bend on the banks of the Ohio. His honeymoon and a short preluding domesticity had been spent in another log structure. It was in a log bastion of Fort Washington that he had set up, on a Captain's pay, what must have been very light housekeeping with Anna Tuthill Symmes, herself born with a spoon of some precious metal in her mouth — not in Virginia, but in northern New Jersey. Her father, John Cleves Symmes, pioneer proprietor of more than a million acres between the Little and the Great Miami rivers, indeed questioned whether young Harrison could support his daughter in the style she was accustomed to, if in any style whatsoever. He put this question, so the story goes, in no rhetorical sense; and Harrison with manly confidence, and quite rhetorically, answered that he would support his wife by the sword, a weapon which at this time brought him in a pittance in dollars and a few perquisites. Among the perquisites was an "apartment" in the southeast bastion of Fort Washington, chief stronghold of the Northwest Territory.

The earliest home of these well-born children of the Atlantic seaboard is pictured and described in many works on the Old Northwest. It was typically the pioneer blockhouse that accompanied the American pioneer on his skirmish line from Pittsburgh to the Sacramento. Even in New England, where the log cabin was very rare, if existing at all in early days, log forts of the kind were sometimes erected on the frontier. Fort Washington, one of the most important and famous in American history, was a large rectangular structure with four such blockhouses joined by a screen of palisades, surrounding barracks, storerooms, kitchens, and other buildings that housed troops and supplies. A contemporary sketch shows the blockhouses with their steeple-like watchtowers, their

overhanging second stories, and their small square embrasures. The interior may be imagined as having housed the Harrisons in the crudest possible domestic comfort, but there began a long and happy domestic life. The bride could look from the ports of her log fortress home to behold the bridegroom drilling his troops on the wilderness parade. Beyond it she could see the Ohio River, still lined with great sycamores and often bearing along on its muddy current flotillas of arks, flatboats, and pirogues, taking restless Americans and their cattle and chattels even farther into the wild west. Not long before she had come this way herself in the same fashion with her father, John Cleves Symmes, veteran of the Revolution, and her mother, née Anna Tuthill of Southold, Long Island. Like Rachel Donelson Jackson, Anna Symmes had forsaken the amenities of the East with an adventurous father and began her married life in a log fort.

The young couple lived a year or so at the Fort — their first child was born there — removing in 1797 to the home at North Bend, fourteen miles down the river, where they were to spend most of their days. Their new dwelling at North Bend, purchased from Mrs. Harrison's father and built by him with logs cut on the site, was luxurious compared with the quarters at Fort Washington. It had as many as three rooms on the ground floor and two on the second, making it an exceedingly commodious house for the time and the place. It stood on a high terrace three-eighths of a mile from the Beautiful River where it made its last great bend to the north. Safe from the highest floods, it had a fine prospect of river and forest. Oak, walnut, rock maple, and beech wooded the gently rolling hills behind the roomy log cabin. Across the river was the deeply forested Kentucky shore with a few clearings foreshadowing the great corn lands soon to flourish on the river bottoms of the West.



This remote and primitive residence in the midst of such great natural beauty housed the Harrisons until 1800, when, as Governor of Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison removed to Vincennes. Here, even deeper in the western wilderness, his Virginia background confessed itself in his building a fine brick house, the largest and most imposing in the Northwest at this time. It would have been called "Harrison's Folly," no doubt, if its dimensions and dignity were not attributable to his office. It was, after all, a governor's mansion, and as such must impress the French and the Indians of the Territory as well as the local pride of American frontiersmen. Among the stumps and cabins of French settlers, this James River mansion on the Wabash dignified the governorship and did no injury in the long run to Harrison's well-earned reputation as a plain man of the plain people.

Grouseland, as he called it, was built of brick made on a near-by farm. Workmen from the East erected the solid frame hewn out of the neighboring forest, laid floors of local yellow poplar, and put in the interior trim of black walnut, cut near the site of the house. In the Virginia style, the house was separate from the kitchen, which was placed in a smaller building to the rear. Slaves were quartered in a great roomy basement, kept warm and dry by open fireplaces. Reminiscent of Virginia was the broad hall with a fine winding stairway at the rear. Two large rooms flanked it, one toward the Wabash, used as a council chamber, the other the family living- or drawing-room. On the second floor were four spacious bedrooms, the Governor's well-sunned by four windows unusually large for the time. The house contained thirteen large fireplaces, well designed to modify the severe cold of a middle-western winter. Reminiscent of Virginia, also, was the cheerful and unlimited hospitality dispensed by the Governor at Grouseland. This extended officially even to

Indians, who, to be sure, were usually entertained in the gardens.

At Vincennes there was much more cleared land than there had been at North Bend. The settlement, begun with a French fort in 1702, was nearly a century old. Governor Harrison, with a Virginian love of land, bought four hundred acres adjoining the mansion. His first summer in Vincennes he had cleared or otherwise prepared for planting three hundred acres. Soon he was producing all the food that his household and his very generous entertaining required. Grouseland had a large kitchen garden, an orchard, a dairy, and a pigpen that furnished the table with hams and bacon — cured, no doubt, in supreme Virginia style. Beer probably was brewed in a home brew-house. Whisky, it seems, was not distilled on the premises, as it was later by Harrison in his home distillery at North Bend. But there cannot be any doubt that the favorite drink of the frontier was decanted for all comers but the Indians.

It was at Grouseland, in an arbor erected beside the mansion, that Governor Harrison held his last futile parleys with Tecumseh. It was from Grouseland in November 1811 that he marched away with his troops to the Battle of Tippecanoe, a very small action by contemporary standards — less than seven thousand Indians and whites were engaged — but one that, with the decisive Battle of the Thames, secured the Northwest from further serious menace and made Harrison the most popular military figure in the Old Northwest. In fact, he became a serious rival of Andrew Jackson, great victor over the Indians and British allies in the Old Southwest. Harrison's victory over the British at the Thames mounted him on the white horse in a very conspicuous way. Unfortunately for Harrison's political career, the Battle of New Orleans soon put Jackson on a white horse quite a few hands higher.

Harrison dismounted from his charger when he retired from the Army in 1814, returned to his roomy log cabin at North Bend, and became a dirt farmer and rustic politician. He furthered his political career there with a hospitality as free-handed as Virginia's, but of a decidedly homespun cast. The vast kitchen fireplace became the social center of the Big House (as in Virginia fashion the remodelled log cabin was called). It was a great rustic salon where Harrison received the plain people, plying them not with vintages à la Berkeley but with good corn whisky from Harrison's own distillery. Here the old soldiers and the new constituents foregathered and further confirmed their belief that Harrison was a war hero, a jolly good fellow, and a man after their own heart. In this large frontier kitchen the North and the South met in high conviviality.

Harrison's more distinguished visitors, it may be, were ushered into the family dining-room, where food was brought from the great kitchen through a breezeway. No doubt the bourbon decanters here were of finer crystal and the spirits mellowed and of higher authority. Guests admitted to this family privacy doubtless could risk revealing that they had been born gentlemen east of the mountains. Even so, this hospitality had divested itself, for the most part, of eighteenth-century English colonial formality. The candor and heartiness and jocosity that would characterize American manners in the West for generations here succeeded to the *politesse* of the seaboard.

Timothy Flint describes his meeting with Harrison here in 1816: "Of his urbanity and general hospitality and kindness, I entertain the most grateful recollections. I could desire no attentions, no facilities for discharging my duty, which he did not constantly proffer me. His house was open for public worship. He kept an open table, to

which every visiter [sic] was welcomed. The table was loaded with abundance, and with substantial good cheer, especially with the different kinds of game. In these respects his house strongly reminded me of the pictures, which my reading had presented me, of old English hospitality. He is a small, and rather sallow-looking man, who does not exactly meet the associations that connect themselves with the name of general. But he grows upon the eye, and upon more intimate acquaintance. There is something imposing in the dignified simplicity of his manners. In the utter want of any show, and insignia, and trappings, there is something, which finely comports with the severe plainness of republicanism. On a fine farm, in the midst of the woods, his house was open to all the neighbours, who entered without ceremony, and were admitted to assume a footing of entire equality. His eye is brilliant. There is a great deal of ardour and vivacity in his manner. He has a copious fund of that eloquence which is fitted for the camp and for gaining partisans."

William Henry Harrison's dignified and cordial courting of the electorate at North Bend took him to Washington as congressman (1816-8) and as senator (1825-8). He was very briefly (1828) minister to Colombia, whence he was abruptly and rudely recalled by the Jacksonian democracy. For seven years thereafter he lived in a retirement of sorts at his farm, where his hospitality and popularity were nowise diminished. While in Bogotá, characteristically, he had interested himself in agriculture, arboriculture, and horticulture.

"I have a very excellent garden, beans, peas, cabbages, cauliflowers, celery and artichokes in abundance and we shall soon have beets," he wrote from Colombia. I have not seen the Chino podican Quinoa, although I am told it is sometimes for sale in the market. I will certainly bring some of it. I have made the acquaintance of Dr. Cespedes,

the Professor of Botany in the College here, and he has promised to get a collection of the rare and beautiful plants which may be likely to succeed with us. I have two very beautiful small trees growing in my garden that I think will thrive in our climate, one a species of broom with a yellow flower, the other covered with blossoms of purple. The thing of greatest consequence which I shall bring home with me is the knowledge of making Pise fences. . . . I am satisfied they will answer for common fencing, but at any rate for enclosing gardens and orchards. I think I could make a fence round my orchard that would not cost more than a good board fence and which would last for one hundred years. I have seen them frequently of that age. A man's farm once fenced in this manner when setting out in life would serve him if it were protected for fifty years from trouble and vexation of breachy animals." The dirt-farmer diplomat was speaking. Like John Adams, or George Washington, or Thomas Jefferson, absent from their home acres, Harrison's candid mind often strayed from the professional uncandor of politics to his Ohio farm, orchards, and gardens. By chance, his residence at Bogotá had a name with a strong horticultural flavor. It was called *Huerto de Jayme*, or James's garden.

His companion in diplomacy at Bogotá, Rensselaer Van Rensselaer (no less), says that Harrison introduced into Colombian vegetable gardening most of the common American vegetables. "When a dinner is given by any of the Diplomatic Corps," Van Rensselaer wrote, "he is always called upon for his vegetables, his celery, turnips, radishes, salads, etc. . . . the finest I ever beheld and he says they grow faster and are more easily cultivated than at home." James A. Green, a biographer of William Henry Harrison (to whom this essay is deeply indebted) says:

"The visitor today to South America will see everywhere our North American flower and garden seeds offered for sale in the same identical little gaily colored envelopes as at home. As far as the author is able to learn General Harrison was the originator of this highly profitable trade."

On the fourth of March 1829 Andrew Jackson was inaugurated President of the United States. Promptly on the eighth of that month Harrison was relieved of his ministry, but without receiving the courtesy of his passage home. Harrison's public life had seemingly ended with the famous Jacksonian proscriptions. But he was only fifty-six, and he had not had his fingers on the highest rungs of the ladder. He was still eager for the final climb, and he did not disavow in any convincing terms his unfulfilled ambitions. On the other hand, he was natively and authentically a land animal. The farm was his habitat, and it was no hardship — on the contrary, it was a joy to him — to return to North Bend and to concern himself again with crops and cattle and fences — not at all neglecting the metaphorical fences of the politician. The local speech-making and hand-shaking and log-rolling went on as he assiduously attended to the serious and fundamental and then well-nigh universal business of farming. This last made him a good living and kept up his reputation for possessing the rustic virtues always dear to an electorate.

"Give him a barrel of hard cider and a pension of two thousand a year," one of his political enemies said, "and, our word for it, he will sit the remainder of his days in a log cabin . . . and study moral philosophy." The slur was worth a thousand columns of newspaper publicity, placing him, as it did among the frontier people who held the balance of power. It made him at last the people's choice:

*The Farmer of North Bend, my boys*

*The Farmer of North Bend.*

*Let every Freeman peal his voice*

*As if the Skies to rend.*

His opponent, Martin Van Buren, was pictured as living in oriental prodigality on the taxpayers' bounty in the White House, while beside the beautiful Ohio Old Tippecanoe followed the plow and trod the puncheon floor with manly simplicity and vigor. As a matter of fact, the Big House at North Bend was one of the biggest in the Ohio Valley. It had a frontage of eight rooms, including two spacious halls. In Virginia it would have been reckoned a sizable house, in rural New England a large one, and in the Ohio open country it was vast. In a contemporary lithograph the Big House has much rural charm, with its environing locusts and rail fences and a canal and the Ohio River winding gracefully in the foreground. An Ohio River steamboat with "Tippecanoe" on the wheel-box and a mule-drawn canal boat have been, no doubt, disingenuously scaled down by the artist, and the Big House extended and heightened. But a replica of the latter, constructed for the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial Exposition (the Big House burned to the ground in 1858) suggests a dwelling that would be called a show place in many an American countryside today. In the reconstruction, in fact, it had the air of a large suburban residence built in the height of the fashion for mid-eighteenth-century domestic architecture — even of a country club of that era.

Harrison had rebuilt the Big House around the original log cabin of his early married life. It was wholly without ornamental detail, excepting a very modest elaboration of gable windows and the lights around the main entrance. No doubt the frame dwelling at Berkeley which preceded

the present brick one of 1725-6 was of a similar plain and almost purely functional design. Frontier domestic architecture in the American colonies and in the United States, as we have observed, usually lagged a generation or so behind innovations of the seaboard. The Big House revived in early Federal days the great rectangular, straightforward, roomy farmhouse of the early or middle eighteenth century, such as Mount Vernon and the Hermitage had been before their radical remodelling. But, invisibly, it incorporated the most primitive of all American domestic architecture, the log dwelling that Jackson and Harrison and Lincoln made sacrosanct in American politics and folklore.

The womenfolk of the Harrison family were not proud of the germinal log cabin, but Harrison himself took delight in opening a closet door and showing visitors a stretch of horizontal logs that had been laid under the direction of his father-in-law, John Cleves Symmes, in earliest Republican days. A granddaughter of William Henry Harrison has admitted that in her childhood she was embarrassed when her grandfather revealed this architectural family skeleton. It seemed to put the family almost in the class of those who still lived from hand to mouth in log cabins. The same granddaughter recalls also that the Big House was very badly arranged for house-keeping. The main house, as we have noted, was only one room in depth and the halls did not afford communication laterally to bedrooms, parlors, drawing-rooms, and a dining-room. Most of these rooms had to be traversed when this granddaughter made a jaunt from one wing of the house to the other. Such an arrangement made service and privacy entirely incompatible. The famous kitchen where Harrison entertained his constituents was in an extension back of the central hall. There was a servants' dining room behind it. It was flanked attractively by a



small court and a grass plot with surrounding shrubbery. Behind the servants' dining room was an orchard.

For this large domestic establishment there was one bath: a tin tub painted black and kept in the washhouse until the ceremony of bathing was about to be observed. Then it was taken down and filled, requiring so much hot water from the kitchen kettles that Mrs. Harrison often complained of Roman luxury and excesses of cleanliness. She herself had a small portable bathtub shaped like an old-fashioned sleigh. It was not nearly so large as the General's, in which one could recline submerged in piping-hot water. It is not recorded that members of the family bathed in the Ohio River, though undoubtedly the Harrison sons (the father of another American president among them) disported themselves there in suitable weather. There was plenty of cold water for the household. It was supplied copiously from springs on the farm. One of them recently was still flowing in the industrial-suburban district that now covers much of Harrison's farm. But most of the brooks of this terrain have dried up, and the beautiful Ohio bears the customary burden of filth put upon most of our rivers.

If Ohio River water, untreated, is no longer potable or recommended for bathing, it still makes part of a fine prospect from the site of the Big House at North Bend. The scene must have been enchanting in the early days of settlement here, and the river very lively indeed in the milder seasons with its variegated navigation up- and downstream. One can congenially imagine the songs, fiddling, and uncouth jocularities of the boatmen breaking the quiet of this remote farm on its high terrace over the river. Here before the Big House was the principal highway from the East to the West, leading at last south to those distant, romantic lands where French and Spanish creoles were

accommodating themselves philosophically enough to a new American sovereignty. No Americans in those days ever lived on a more beautiful stretch of river than the Harrisons at North Bend. Domiciled as plainly as they may have been in a new country, the Harrisons had in their front dooryard a majestic riverscape that rivalled any the East could show.

Today, from Pittsburgh to Wheeling, the beautiful Ohio is bordered almost unbrokenly by slums and slag heaps. Where sycamores grew in the bottom lands, the lava piles of heavy industry mountainously rise, and smoke and fumes and chemical excreta make a Stygian landscape. There our fellowmen are housed, for the most part, in dismal frame dwellings and a squalor that makes the hard plain living of the frontier seem to have been idyllic indeed. Industrial progress, fortunately, is only sporadic below Wheeling and not yet dominant at North Bend. There on a height near the river stands a monument to Harrison which, until the other day, the captains of river boats used to salute piously with a low blast from their whistles.

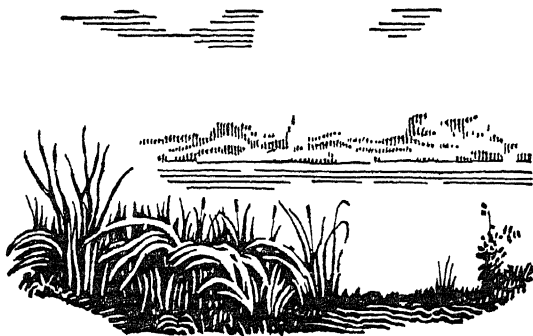
In those early days the view from the rear windows of William Henry Harrison's house was of flower gardens and lawns, backed by hills swelling into summer blue above dense hardwoods. Roses and old-fashioned flowers bloomed near the kitchen garden, which was bordered by currant, raspberry, and gooseberry bushes bearing lush crops in the freshly cleared soil. In the center of the kitchen garden stood a small brick building of one room, furnished with a chair or two and a desk littered with papers. It was called "The General's Office." Here he met tenants and transacted other farm business. On the rise above the kitchen garden were stables, barns, and other outbuildings and a fine orchard of apples, pears, and

peaches. A mile to the north was a gristmill where custom and family grinding were done by water power from Indian Creek, now shrunk to a trickle because of man's inhumanity to land. Near the gristmill was a distillery, producing excellent corn whisky for home consumption and the entertainment of visitors and house guests, and a surplus for New Orleans, where its quality found it a good market. This distillery was razed in the early thirties in a mood of compunction or because of political expediency. If it was compunction that closed the distillery, this did not arise from any personal excesses of William Henry Harrison, who always drank in great moderation.

Corn, wheat, and hay were the principal crops on General Harrison's twenty-eight hundred acres along the Ohio. Cattle, sheep, hogs, turkeys, and chickens were raised in abundance. Hams, bacon, salt pork, and corned beef lasted well through the winter. Three hundred and sixty-five hams, one for every day in the year (legend has it) were consumed, and were supplemented very ably by the great staple, hominy. There were ample supplies of peach and apple butter and dried fruits in a day when canning was still a complicated and uncertain process and was seldom practised in the New World. Virtually nothing in the way of food, feed, fiber, beverages malt and spirituous, or condiments was purchased for this large family and its countless guests, except tea, coffee, salt, and sugar. There was an icehouse, always well stored. Ice cream was frequently served at North Bend. Cream and milk flowed in oceans from a large dairy, and honey in very considerable volume from an apiary in the orchard.

Most of the Harrison acres were farmed by Harrison himself, but he had several tenants who worked some of his land on shares. He was reputedly not exacting about his share of the produce. Sometimes a tenant who was bringing in to Harrison's cribs the General's share of the

of Harrisons the Farmer of North Bend, carefully nurtured in Tidewater Virginia, stands out as a Virginian of the best blood who hazarded new fortunes on the land in the Old Northwest and rose on merit, a self-made man, to the highest places and power among the plain people of the United States.



## VII

### JAMES BUCHANAN: WHEATLAND

*They are there, there, there with Earth immortal  
(Citizens, I give you friendly warning).*

*The things that truly last when men and times have  
passed.*

*They are all in Pennsylvania this morning.*

“Philadelphia,” Rudyard Kipling.

Visit Wheatland on an April morning and you will find there a number of things that may not be immortal, but are long-lived at least, and among them this modest and well-mannered country house of James Buchanan, fifteenth President of the United States. Once immediately environed by fat Pennsylvania German farms, it is now separated from them by a sightly suburban growth but still shares with the farm land of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a calm and content such as is conducive to long life. Buchanan's brick manor is not of the Pennsylvania German culture. It did not derive from hard-won profits of Pennsylvania German farming. Banking and law and politics built its central structure and added the two large

wings. Wheatland farming was incidental and avocational with Buchanan and previous owners. But it was, as the name denotes, built on land that had been golden for a hundred summers with the wheat of Mennonite farmers — on good soil tilled and well-manured for generations by those people in the United States whose agriculture has been most stable and the longest-lived (shall we say, the best farmers in North America?) — the Pennsylvania Germans.

There is a serenity in Lancaster County that is not idyllic. It is the calm rather of steady and rewarding labor, of deep self-respect and security, of fair rewards for good judgment and toil. The Pennsylvania German farmers of Lancaster have been, for the most part, untempted by the great variety of get-rich-quick agriculture that has come and gone in three centuries of American farming. Here the farm family persists in undiminished strength and increasing prosperity, having adapted itself cautiously to nearly all the many changes that have come to Pennsylvania farming since the region was hewn out of oak forest in the earliest eighteenth century.

Standing on the porch of Wheatland on a fine spring morning in the very spot where James Buchanan delivered so many plausible presidential campaign speeches in the fifties, the visitor feels in this old-settled land something of the large hope that only the new cities and ranch lands of the Southwest can readily stir today. It is not an extravagant hope that one feels here, but an old and hardy one which has never been suddenly and overwhelmingly borne down into decadence and despair. The things that truly last have grown in this productive region, well tended for more than two hundred years. Here is a people that has kept its line of communications with the past unbroken. Here are folk whose progress has been slow but continuous from the forest clearing to the latest social

benefits of corporate industry. Here are remarkable social longevity, sanity, and good health. The past, the present, and the future here are all of one piece, a thriving whole locked in an interdependence never broken. The Pennsylvania Germans are often presented as a limited people, and this is true in the best sense of the word: if their life is limited, it is also well-founded, well-rounded, self-contained, and complete. Their strength derives today, as in its beginnings, from good sense, good morals, godliness, and a good soil well tended.<sup>1</sup>

Here in Lancaster County, in fact, is the soil which has been the best tended and the most productive for the longest time in North America. Back of two centuries of good farming in Pennsylvania lie a thousand years of good farming in the upper Rhine Valley, whence these Swiss and German Mennonites were forced to migrate (by some of the most cruel devastations of modern warfare and social upheavals that followed the Thirty Years' War in the later seventeenth century). These Rhenish farmers transplanted to Pennsylvania in the early eighteenth century an agricultural skill that was bred in the bone, along with a sober sense of life's being a hard and incessant strife of a kind in which the survivors are very likely to be not the best warriors or the smartest traders but those who indefatigably produce and reproduce to the limit of their strength. The Pennsylvania Germans have known for generations that a chosen people must

<sup>1</sup> The concentration of the Pennsylvania Germans upon piety and farm labor has never resulted in cultural sterility. In Franklin's time Pennsylvania German printing presses and newspapers were as numerous as the English ones, although the English outnumbered the Germans two to one. Where was musical culture more enthusiastically supported than in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in our early days? Pennsylvania German furniture and ceramics hold a high place in American folk art. Pennsylvania German cooking as a domestic art was early made much of by these people and has many devotees outside their group today. Their inbred, ingrown, laborious, pious life flowered early, never self-consciously or "artily," but spontaneously and naïvely in music and the plastic arts.

bear misfortune piously and courageously, and live and labor in fear and trembling. They must work and watch and pray. The habits of thrift, foresight, and toil that were so common in the early days of the American people still function in Lancaster County and produce the traditional results in the same degree: security, competence, independence, and, if God wills, modest prosperity. While others east, west, north, and south have mined the rich soils of America of their fertility, speculating in land and cash crops that vainly promise great fortunes, the Pennsylvania German has ventured slowly away from the medieval pattern of self-sustaining husbandry and kept his soil producing abundant crops and a stable family and social life.<sup>2</sup>

In gradual advance the sound methods of diversified agriculture of earlier days have been modified cautiously from time to time, and new ways assimilated to the old ones. A fertile soil has been kept in health and great productivity by classic means of renewal, especially the organic manures of well-stabled cattle. As in the earliest days, when the Pennsylvania German was on the cow-pens edge of the advance of American agriculture into the wilderness and transported his fattened beef to market on the hoof, he continues to winter-feed and fatten

<sup>2</sup> "Farmers in the general vicinity of Philadelphia contributed more to the early knowledge of farm improvements than the farmers of any other section of the original thirteen colonies," according to L. Huber: "Two Hundred Years of Farming in Lancaster County" (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers*. Volume XXXV, Number 5; 1931). Describing the practice that more than any other, perhaps, accounts for the maintenance of soil fertility among Lancaster County farmers, Huber says: "It must be remembered that the spacious barns found on our Lancaster County farms today had their inception from the earliest settlements. The straw from the grains, corn stalks and refuse from the stables of these great barns, were thrown promiscuously into the barn-yard to be trampled under the feet of fattening cattle during the winter. The barn-yards were cleaned once a year (after harvest), and this refuse was spread over the fields and plowed under . . . for wheat."



beeves and to restore the fertility of the soil with their manure. He still recapitulates also the era when Pennsylvania was the bread basket of America, growing today in balanced measure and good yield the wheat and corn which are, as ever, the basis of all American wealth. Feeding himself, his animals, and his soil thus, he has become also a grower of tobacco who rivals in total quantity and surpasses in yield per acre the great tobacco growers of the South. His profits per acre from tobacco are high, but he is not tempted by them to extend his tobacco planting in a measure that would throw out of balance his traditional diversified farming.<sup>3</sup> Not averse to chemical fertilizers nor to liming, he learned long ago what the hasty are learning belatedly, that a little of these stimulants goes a long way. In short, for generations he has used his hard head, permitting cupidity and rashness to experiment for him, picking up amid ill-advised and over-eager and greedy experimentation a residue of real benefit.

If James Buchanan were to return to Wheatland today and to entertain — as he loved to do — his Pennsylvania German farm neighbors, he would find them not greatly changed, as represented in their progeny and their farms and their farming. The brilliant and seemingly munificent agriculture of the South of his day, on the other hand, cannot be found anywhere. Wheatland itself, farmed by Buchanan avocationally and in a Pennsylvania German fashion for the most part, was modelled socially after the great southern plantations whose economic and social and

<sup>3</sup> "Pennsylvania leads the states in the production of cigar leaf tobacco and ranks seventh in the total production of all tobaccos. The production centering around 1924 was almost 8 times the total production in 1870. Acreage increased sixfold, and the average yield gained over 300 pounds during this 55 year period." From G. F. Johnson: "A Study of Trends in County and State since 1840" (*Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, General Bulletin No. 484*; November 1929).

family life is now merely a beautiful memory. Born not far north of the Mason and Dixon Line and deeply involved politically in southern agricultural economy, Buchanan's purchase of Wheatland is charged very credibly to his desire to have the surfaces of his life, at least, not out of line with the old plantation culture. His southern constituents and patrons found themselves at home in this brick manor, which itself would have been almost perfectly at home in Virginia. Its sober Georgian front, its roomy wings, its spaciouly proportioned rooms, high-ceiled and generously fenestrated, with their solid and pompous furnishings, to a southern planter of 1850 would seem correct for an aspirant to the presidency. He would likewise approve of the plate, the crystal, the porcelain, the whiskies, and the vintages and viands — also the manners of the host, his eighteenth-century courtesy and formality, his slightly aloof yet impeccably gracious politeness, his presence — a finished one perfected at the Court of St. James's and the court of Czar Nicholas I. For Buchanan, when he domiciled himself at Wheatland, was very much a man of the world — of a great world that had included the greatest of Europe of his time.

Returning from the Court of St. James's in 1856 the most popular American politician of his day, James Buchanan had come a long way. He was born in 1791 at Stony Batter, Pennsylvania — then on the inner edge of the back country — the son of a farmer and general storekeeper who was a native of County Donegal in the North of Ireland. Back-country farmers brought in their wheat as the commodity most generally acceptable in exchange for salt, hardware, textiles, and other goods they did not produce themselves. The cabin and the store were on the verge of the forest, where, among the stumps and the brush (tradition has it) the infant Buchanan was turned loose with a sheep bell hung around his neck so that his

mother could tell by ear how far he was straying in the clearing. Like the father, the mother was of Scotch-Irish stock, recently arrived in America. According to James Buchanan himself, she was an extraordinarily ardent housewife, who, in the better days that arrived, could not be persuaded to give up any of the household chores which were the routine of her early domestic life. "My father," Buchanan said, "did everything he could to prevent her from laboring in her domestic concerns, but it was all in vain. I have often myself, during the vacations at school and college, sat down in the kitchen and whilst she was at the wash-tub, entirely from choice, have spent hours pleasantly and instructively in conversing with her." Daughter and wife of a farmer, this tireless housewife was a woman whose enthusiastic toil yet left her mind and imagination free and active; for somehow she found time to read, and what she read was most certainly worth reading: the poetry of Milton, Pope, Young, Cowper, and Thomson. "I do not think, at least until a late period of her life," Buchanan reminisces, "she had ever read a criticism on any one of these authors, and yet such was the correctness of her natural taste that she had selected for herself and could repeat every passage in them which has been admired."

Buchanan's father was a man of good business judgment, and of great energy and perseverance. "He had received a good English education," Buchanan says, "and had that kind of knowledge of mankind which prevented him from being ever deceived in his business. With these qualifications, with the facility of obtaining goods on credit at Baltimore . . . his circumstances soon improved. He bought the Dunwoodie farm for £1500 in 1794, and had previously purchased the property on which he resided at the Cove Gap.

"For some years before his death . . . he had quit the

mercantile business, and devoted his time and attention to superintending his farm, of which he was very fond."

Twice removed from its original site, the one-room log cabin in which our fifteenth president was born can be seen today in Chambersburg in a good state of preservation. It is not so far from the headquarters where Old John Brown of Ossawatimie stowed carbines and made plans for one of the most tragic events of James Buchanan's administration. Buchanan, in fact, was born and reared in a region where antislavery sentiment was strong, even fanatical, and where the underground railway ran day and night on schedule. A humane man in all his personal relations, he nevertheless kept clear of Abolitionism and can be accused of favoring the extension of slavery. If he had lived a few miles farther south, conceivably he might have been a slaveholder. But one looks in vain for slave quarters at Wheatland. Nevertheless, if a row of cabins had been pictured in the lithograph of Wheatland that was such an important property in the presidential campaign of 1856, it would not have seemed out of place.

This lithograph, now a rare collector's item, was distributed in vast quantity, especially in the South, where the style of life suggested by the Wheatland manor was that of a country gentleman of the old school whose home, if it faced northeast geographically, politically faced almost due south. It is one of the ironies of American presidential campaigns that William Henry Harrison, born in a Tidewater plantation home of great elegance, was elected president under the powerful symbol of the log cabin, whereas James Buchanan, who first saw the light darkly in a one-room log cabin, was pictured as born in a manor. The astute misrepresentations of the Whig politicians who campaigned for Harrison did very well in their brief rise to power. In the decline and complete loss of Whig power, however, the sentiments of the old Virginia Demo-

crats had had a resurrection, and high ceilings, ample acreage, and lavish hospitality — old style — were the appropriate background again for a presidential aspirant. Actually the matter was not overdone at Wheatland, a modest enough country place with only twenty-two acres of land altogether. The Negro servant who received political leaders and office-holders and -seekers at its portal was as free as his master. The agriculture of Buchanan's Pennsylvania German neighbors may have retained medieval features, but serfdom was not one of them. The thriving town of Lancaster near-by was soundly bourgeois, a rich farm market not at all inhospitable to business or industry. What the lithograph implied, to tell the truth, was without substantial foundation. Wheatland, since its acreage had been sold by a Pennsylvania German farmer to a Lancaster banker, had been a middle-class summer residence.

Wheatland, you might say without invidious intentions — the context is that of politics — was two-faced. It faced north and it faced south, not topographically but metaphorically, and in both directions with the bland dignity and practical duplicity that politics demands of its practitioners. Buchanan bought it with such Janus exigencies in mind long before he conducted his final triumphal "front porch" campaign there in 1856. In fact, it was in 1849 that he removed from bachelor quarters in Lancaster to Wheatland, which at once became a rendezvous of Democratic politicians of the first rank. He made his first unsuccessful bid for the presidential nomination in 1844, losing to James K. Polk. A second trial was defeated in the Democratic convention of 1848 by Lewis Cass, who lost to the Whig Zachary Taylor in the succeeding presidential election. Buchanan was put aside once more in the convention of 1852, which elevated Franklin Pierce to power. At last in 1856, his personal popularity surmounting all

these set-backs and seemingly thriving on them, he found himself the man of the hour. His good presence, his Scotch-Irish wit and address, his inveterate moderation and good sense, his solid and learned stand on the Constitution of the United States throughout his career, and the desperate demands of the time for a working compromise between North and South, sent him into the presidential campaign full-sailed. Wheatland was the center of the Democratic world for many months, the front porch of this pleasant manor its very navel. There stood the candidate, with his height of six feet or more and his extraordinary topknot (worn nevertheless with great dignity), his head slightly tilted to one side and his eyes in a squint, delivering himself of the blameless generalities dear to politicians, and cheered to the echo by loyal Democrats. Thence he departed for the White House with the usual fanfare. He was on the crest of a wave of personal fortunes long building — alas, also on the crest of a wave which would come thundering down in fratricidal war for his successor, a more candid politician from Illinois and another authentic log-cabin native of the Whig tradition, Abe Lincoln.

James Buchanan returned to Wheatland in 1860 an old and broken man. He had said to Abraham Lincoln as he left the White House: "If you are as happy, my dear sir, on entering this house, as I am in leaving it and returning home, you are the happiest man in this country." To the citizens of Lancaster who welcomed him home he said: "I have come to lay my bones among you, during the brief intermediate period which Heaven may allot me." This period of retirement at Wheatland, slightly more than seven years, was not one of evening peace and happy renown. On the contrary, the aging ex-president not only had innumerable wounds to lick, but almost daily kept receiving deep fresh ones in public and private corre-

spondence. He was fairly bludgeoned with slander, as many another politician or statesman fallen from power. Unfortunately, history has left him lying there with his entirely honorable reputation mangled beyond recognition and denied even a decent burial.

Judgment of Buchanan's political career is certainly not within the province of this essay on his country life, except as, once again, political calumny is seen darkening the well-earned rural retirement of an American ex-president. We have seen honest, vain, and irascible John Adams brought to his exceedingly low boiling point amid Quincy hayfields whenever he reflected on the aspersions of political enemies or the ingratitude of the electorate. The calmer disillusion of Jefferson appears often enough in his later correspondence. Washington, in his retirement at Mount Vernon, broke his native reticence rarely, but when he did it was white-hot lava that overflowed upon the ingratitude of the sovereign people. From Andrew Jackson at the Hermitage there was a continual eruption flowing in a different direction — upon the moneyed aristocracy. William Henry Harrison was spared such indignations and mortifications in the evening of life. As Emerson said of him in his journal, "He died of the presidency in one month," done to death in his sixty-ninth year by campaigning and the swinish herd of office-seekers. Abraham Lincoln was spared by an assassin further calumny. Surely he had been abused enough. But James Buchanan expired slowly at Wheatland, broken by a weight of slander that might have destroyed a man of iron impudicity. The agreeable country life which had served as a background for his political ambitions, which he sincerely loved for its own sake and to which he had looked forward for ease and comfort in old age, became for him merely thin covert from the slings and arrows he had imperturbably stood up to in public life for many

years. He was pictured in his retirement at Wheatland as having been almost wholly responsible for a war with which our political and economic life had long been gravid. The greater statesman and shrewder politician who succeeded James Buchanan could not avoid this fate — the monstrous fate of a war between the states.<sup>4</sup>

At Wheatland James Buchanan sat down in an invalid and maligned old age to write an apologia that went for the most part unnoticed amid the horrors of civil war. In the long study in the east wing of Wheatland where he had conferred with so many politicians for so many years, his veteran skills of lawyer, politician, and diplomat were deployed in a strong defense of his administration — a defense that is still one of the least-read documents of American history. There the strict Constitutionalist and gentleman of the eighteenth-century school of American politics took what consolation he might in penning a self-justification that few would notice. All around him were the properties of a tranquillity that he had held in prospect for many years: his comfortable and dignified country home and its fertile acres; the domestic *ménage* of his niece Harriet Lane, whose charm and *savoir-faire* and

<sup>4</sup> James Buchanan's greatest successes until the presidency had been those of a diplomat. If the chief activity of diplomacy is negotiation, its chief purpose the avoidance of war, let us remember that Buchanan's administration maintained peace by negotiation at a time when war between the North and South might have broken out at any moment. The weakness of which he is still accused, if it was weakness, derived from strategies which were roughly those of Horace Greeley, one of the greatest antislavery journalists of the time. Greeley denied the right of any state to remain in the Union and nullify its laws, but would offer no resistance if a considerable portion of the Union resolved to secede. Buchanan's tactics, on the eve of Secession, were also not very different from those of his successor, Abraham Lincoln, whose dislike of Abolitionism and conciliatory spirit toward the South were seldom termed weak. Buchanan's case deserves an appeal to the highest court of history, where the final verdict might very well be that his strategy and tactics were the only ones in the least likely to achieve "diplomatic" victory and avoid war.



splendid good looks had contributed so much to Buchanan's social successes in London.

Frustrated in love in his youth, Buchanan had remained a romantic bachelor, eminently *bon parti* at home and abroad (like Thomas Jefferson), but seemingly unsusceptible to all womanly charms and matchmakers. His affections centered in this orphaned niece, whom he had taken under his protection in her childhood. His affections were well requited. She made a home for him and a salon with the utmost warmth and tact, and redeemed his later years from complete desolation. In 1856 they had returned from England, the veteran politician and diplomat and the handsome young woman who had contributed so much charm and flourish to his mission.<sup>5</sup> It was April when they arrived at Wheatland, a month that still makes the place a sweet eighteenth-century lyric of country life, stately yet fresh and gay. Even Buchanan's aplomb, as his letters show, could be slightly ruffled by an April breeze at Wheatland, by the songs of birds newly arrived from Maryland, by the new verdure in fine old shade trees and early flowers springing in the borders, by frogs peeping in the great spring at the foot of the lawn. In April 1856, especially, he could respond to all this stirring of new things, for his own highest fortunes were coming into leaf and flower. How sad indeed, five years later, to be again in the midst of all this rejuvenation at Wheatland with his forces spent and the thunder of Sumter as loud as doom in the dispatches! The retired president had stepped from his barouche at Wheatland only a few weeks before. The band had played *Home Sweet Home* and Harriet Lane had burst into tears. Buchanan had briefly thanked his welcomers, reminded them that he was now

<sup>5</sup> When James Buchanan received his honorary degree at Oxford, Miss Lane stole the show not only from the American ambassador but also from the most popular poet of his age, Alfred Tennyson, who received an Oxford honorary degree the same day.

a private citizen, and entering his famous porch, may well have commented to himself on the romantic irony for him at this moment of John Howard Payne's song. Unlike poor Payne, he had at last the time and the place, after many pleasures and palaces, to appease his desire for quiet and simplicity by living in a country home. But the world of political power which he had inhabited for so many years was falling to pieces. There would be no domestic peace of any kind, political or familial, for many years — least of all at his Wheatland.

Wheatland, or The Wheatlands as it was called before Buchanan's purchase, had been sowed to wheat for generations by Pennsylvania German farmers. Wheat grown here in earlier days, when Pennsylvania produced most of the daily bread of Colonial and early Federal America, was in Buchanan's day moving westward along the Mohawk through western New York into Ohio. Among staple crops cotton was now king in the United States, producing hordes of *parvenu* planters in the South and swelling the fortunes of newly rich bankers in the North who financed cotton on terms and at rates of interest under which southern producers groaned and sometimes cursed menacingly. But the South was confident that cotton would win the war, forcing British intervention. How else could the cotton factories of England keep their operatives employed and their owners in the new affluence they had won with the substantial aid of slave and child labor? The blockade threatened their very existence. The law of self-preservation would sooner or later enforce upon them measures of some kind that would put Britain decisively on the side of the South. Southerners who reasoned so had not reckoned on another crop, indispensable to human life, as cotton was not. They had not been forewarned, moreover, that a short crop of wheat in the Old World threatened to take the bread out of the mouths of unem-

ployed cotton-spinners and the rest of the great new industrial proletariat of England. Cotton was clothing but wheat was food.

It is much more than a half-truth to say that the Civil War, toward its close, was a contest between wheat and cotton, and that wheat won the war. A large crop of wheat in the North and an unusually small one in Europe introduced into British diplomacy one of those basic realities from which the eyes may not be long averted. Amid all the Gordian complications of diplomacy, the question of bread was decisively consulted, and the British intervention that the South counted on so confidently was not forthcoming. Famine is an even uglier specter than war. The cotton kingdom fell because men must eat.

The Pennsylvania German farmers around Gettysburg drove their herds up into the wooded hills on the eve of the decisive battle, and drove them down again when the great retreat commenced. A few hours later, where death had harvested so many young men of the North and the South, these laborious farmers belatedly got in the wheat. They alone of all northern farmers saw full armies of the North and the South filing along the dusty roads at wheat-harvest time or trampling down the grain with foot and hoof and cannon wheel. Little did they know that the cereal that they cut was as decisively the victor as the living and the dead of the Union armies at Gettysburg.



## VIII

### ABRAHAM LINCOLN: BACKWOODS FARM BOY

Certainly one of the most fateful and auspicious places in America is the Sinking Spring at the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln. In a natural grotto of Kentucky limestone its cold, clear stream emerges, crosses a narrow shelf of rock in channels it has worn through the ages, falls a few feet into a shadowy basin, and disappears in a lower stratum of the limestone. Above it flourishes a grove of hardwood trees. Across a glade, fenced with rails, towers a grand white oak, survivor of those boundless woods whose conquest by Europeans is the first chapter in the history of the American people. This venerable oak and the grottoed spring, even if they were not close to the birthplace of the greatest man our civilization has produced, would stir in the least imaginative person a strange sense of wonder. "Here is an oak of Dodona or of the Druids; here are prophetic or healing waters," the subliminal mind whispers.

A Doric temple on a hill gives background to the illusion. Even a modern child, hygienically educated outside ancient history and its supposedly outworn superstitions, might look from the temple to this cryptic water issuing from the rock with something like the awe the ancients

felt in such places. If there were no legend associated with this spring and this oak and this portico, a child or a poet would create one.

As a matter of fact, the most beautiful and powerful legend of the American people began here. This source and this tree mark the birthplace of the first "saint" in the hagiology of America — that is, in the lay hagiology of its plain people. The oak and the spring were present at the birth of Abraham Lincoln, and were natural features that dominated his infancy. The log cabin Lincoln was born in, removed from its original site, is sheltered in the classic temple. This may seem an incongruous housing of humility in magnificence to those who forget that temple columns were originally tree trunks set on end by a forest people. The combination represents the infancy of the log cabin housed in the complete maturity of the greatest architecture of all time.<sup>1</sup> Let us not forget either that the infant who played on the dirt floor of the cabin grew in a short lifetime to a stature, place in the world, and moral influence which rank him with the greatest men of antiquity and with the truly great and good men of all time.

In spite of all the incontinent praise of Abraham Lincoln that has been poured out since his martyrdom, and in spite of a natural revulsion from it that has been strongly felt at times since, this man was of the company of the saints and the martyrs. Certainly he was one of those

<sup>1</sup> "Metaponte eut un temple en bois; le premier temple de Delphes était construit en branches de laurier et avait la forme d'une hutte; le temple de Poseidon Hippios, près de Mantinée . . . était bâti en bois de chêne, etc. . . . On admet d'ordinaire que les temples, avant d'être bâtis en pierre, furent bâtis en bois et en métal, et qu'à une époque lointaine ces deux matières furent employées ensemble ou séparément." From V. Laloux: *L'Architecture Grecque* (Paris: Maison Quantin; 1888). The Ionic column is said to have been of smaller proportions and more delicate in design because Ionian forests were of slighter growth than the great oak woods of European Greece where Doric architecture originated.

human beings, formally beatified or not, who inspire a religious love and reverence everywhere. Lincoln's profound human goodness, alloyed with his plain, even coarse humanity, has affected millions with a love of certain moral qualities that could redeem the world if they became prevalent. It is not blasphemous to speak of "the imitation of Abraham Lincoln." He was a "saint" of almost Messianic rank.

Living as we do in a proud high noon of the reason and of scientific materialism, with the light of the mind apparently casting no shadows, we are inclined fatuously to deny the immense twilight and the darkness that lie beyond the reach of scientific enlightenment. It is there, perhaps, that the impulse to venerate Lincoln arises so strongly and spontaneously in the irreligious modern mind. The Lincoln legend has been an exceedingly edifying and creative one. It was not made out of whole cloth by a priesthood or by the folk imagination. It was humbly *lived* by Abraham Lincoln.

The American folk did not plant the oak or pipe the spring to the limestone ledge, or endow Lincoln with his poor but honest parents, dwelling in this lowly cabin when he was born. They did not create bastardy in his maternal line or make his father a wandering carpenter. They did not fill Lincoln's heart full to overflowing with compassion for man and beast, create his deep honesty, alloy it with peasant shrewdness and cunning, make him a champion of the oppressed, or do him to death with an assassin's bullet on Good Friday in 1865. All these elements of legend were assembled by the hand of fate. Historical fact may have been egregiously embroidered by poets good, bad, and indifferent, and by politicians and plain people. The legend exists, but initially a strong weave of fact and reality took the old shape of myth. It will not unravel, however much cynics and psychological

mandarins may gnaw and pick at it testily and stretch it this way and that.

How easy it is to imagine Lincoln flashing one of his benevolent and ironical smiles upon such tall talk! This rustic Middle Western politician and lawyer, with his strong sense of the ridiculous and his incurable feelings of inferiority, would no doubt disavow his popular canonization with some coarse jest. But he would be forced to admit that from his birth in this log cabin at Sinking Spring he was cut out to become a great hero of the people. Not Horatio Alger, nor Herndon, nor Hay and Nicolay, but God in His infinite wisdom made this saint out of Kentucky clay. Lincoln's utmost humility and his profound common sense and his ribald humor cannot demolish or change its main outlines. Let us begin the tale of his rustic life in boyhood and youth with one of his own lowly modest self-estimates.

"It is a great folly," he said, "to attempt to make anything out of me or my early life. It can all be condensed into a single sentence; and that sentence you will find in Gray's 'Elegy': — 'The short and simple annals of the poor.'" Add to this conciseness a few words particularizing these annals: "I was raised to farm work, which I continued until I was twenty-two."

There you have, briefly enough, just about all Abraham Lincoln had to say about the backwoods farm life that began for him at Sinking Spring in the winter of 1809. Any number of reminiscences and anecdotes of this childhood, boyhood, youth — mostly apocryphal, but some of his own telling — have been assembled, but they add nothing to the succinct eloquence of the words we have quoted.

As for his parentage and his descent he is equally laconic: "My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families." His father he described as literally without education, "a wandering, laboring boy." It was

to his mother that he owed everything he was, he said. He did not know the exact location of his birthplace, but it was somewhere on Nolin's Creek in Kentucky, he thought. But the world has strictly identified this "little model farm that produced a man," as Mark Twain called it, and whole books have been written on the genealogy that Lincoln vaguely guessed at. One of the most authoritative of them finds <sup>2</sup> — here again are familiar elements of legend — that his family had seen better days and that his grandfather had been a man of considerable property in the Shenandoah Valley. It adds that the antecedent ancestry were well-to-do, at times even prosperous farmers, ironmongers, and weavers — men mostly with good estates for the time. There appears to have been little dramatic incident in these middle-class lives until the grandfather of Abraham Lincoln took to the backwoods of Kentucky and was killed by an Indian as he was planting corn in a fresh clearing. It is an interesting fact, no doubt, that Lincoln's great-great-great-grandfather established the first Catalan forge in New England and may have been the first American to forge iron.<sup>3</sup> This "ironmongering," as the records call it, was varied through the generations with weaving and farming. Nearly all the Lincolns in this long line (beginning with the immigrant Samuel Lincoln, a weaver), when they were not farmers or "yeomen," engaged in farming as an auxiliary activity to their trades. None in the six generations from the native English ancestor to Abraham Lincoln, the President, lived entirely away from the land.

<sup>2</sup> Marion Learned: *Abraham Lincoln. An American Migration* (Philadelphia: W. J. Campbell; 1909).

<sup>3</sup> "Wherever the Lincoln family lived, in New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, its members were people of substance and local prominence. Mordecai Lincoln, the great-great-great-grandfather of the President, established the first furnace and forge for making wrought iron in New England." From Isaac R. Pennypacker: "The Lincoln Legend" (*American Mercury*, Volume I, Number 1; January 1924).



There is historical drama in these six generations of Lincolns — in the typical migration they made from the Massachusetts Bay Colony (where Samuel Lincoln landed in 1637) through new country or the backwoods of East Jersey, Piedmont Pennsylvania, down the Great Valley, over the Wilderness Trail, to the dark and bloody ground of Kentucky (very literally dark and bloody for Abraham Lincoln's grandfather, shot dead by an Indian near Hughes Station in 1786). Their long migration through the forest is almost the whole story of colonial and American expansion in North America for nearly two centuries.

The story of Lincoln's forebears in America begins at Salem, Massachusetts, then a backwoods town surrounded by virgin forest, when Samuel Lincoln, indentured servant, landed there from the *John and Dorothy*. It ends two centuries later, with the great forest still falling under the pioneer ax, with the same race of people still seeking to appease its eternal land hunger, this time at the great banquet of the transmontane clearings. The wood-and-corn culture of the pioneers was arising where Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton had "struck hands over a small plot of corn in the cane brakes of Kentucky" not long before. Judge William Cooper, father of James Fenimore, the great romancer of American pioneering, describes this wood culture in his *Guide in the Wilderness*, published a year after Abraham Lincoln's birth: "Not to speak of wooden houses, bridges, and *roads* — of wood for fuel and fencing — we find it adopted in the west for purposes more anomalous, where wooden pins are substituted for nails, and wells are curbed with hollow logs, where the cabin door swinging on wooden hinges, is fastened with a wooden latch, and the smoke escapes through a wooden chimney. . . . Well may ours be called a *wooden country* not merely from the extent of its forest but be-

cause in common use wood has been substituted for a number of most necessary and common articles — such as stone, iron, and even leather.” He might have added to the list the furniture and table utensils of these forest people — their spoons, bowls, and trenchers. In Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania the ironworking Lincolns had risen above this wood culture, only to descend again on the western slope of the Appalachians. Lincoln’s father, Thomas, became a jack-of-all-trades, but chiefly a worker in wood — a carpenter and cabinetmaker.

The murder of Abraham Lincoln’s grandfather when Thomas Lincoln was a small boy had much to do, no doubt, with a further decline of fortune for this far-flung branch of the Lincoln family. Virginia laws of primogeniture, still in force in Kentucky, gave the property of the dead man to his eldest son, Mordecai, who seems to have dealt generously with his younger brothers. Thomas, it appears, received gratuitously land from his father’s large tracts in the wilderness. But the widow and sons were veritably land-poor, and Thomas had to look out for himself at an early age. He has been pictured so often as a shiftless man and boy that one should take into consideration much documentary evidence to the contrary. Various records suggest that he spent a boyhood and youth of uninterrupted hard labor on farms. He is known to have served an apprenticeship to a carpenter. In the manner of the industrious apprentice, he married his master’s daughter. He saved money and acquired land. He served in the Kentucky militia and in various minor offices of his community. Laborious research cannot find a single account in court records of his ever having broken the peace.<sup>4</sup> His

<sup>4</sup> “The writer, after examining thousands of public records in Kentucky, affirms that there is no document of which he is aware that is detrimental in any way to the reputation of Thomas Lincoln. Hundreds of other documents have been read charging others with drunkenness, adultery, engaging in riots, breaking the Lord’s Day, assault and battery,

greatest fault, by the records, seems to have been his buying of properties with dubious or bad titles — Kentucky was full of them in those days. Why he quitted the trade of carpenter in the backwoods village of Elizabethtown to take up farming at the Sinking Spring in 1808 is not plain. But to picture Thomas Lincoln as a vagrant and ne'er-do-well is a facile slander upon a hard-working and fairly unsuccessful young man who, whatever his abilities and energy, did not fail to apply them steadily and laboriously.

Documentary records and hearsay give us in Thomas Lincoln, in fact, merely a typical uneducated backwoodsman whose ideal of manhood was the sufficiently manly one embodied in Daniel Boone, a friend of Thomas Lincoln's father and a family connection. Thomas Lincoln has been most plausibly presented by the popular dramatist and novelist, Thomas Dixon, as a man who sincerely regarded learning and regular employment as degrading to a real man, and who lived in fear that his headstone might bear the inscription: "Born a man and died a jack-leg carpenter." His younger kinsman, the garrulous Dennis Hanks, who lived so long in or on the edge of the family of Thomas Lincoln, is credibly quoted on Thomas Lincoln: "Looks didn't count them days, nohow. It was stren'th an' work an' daredevil. A lazy man or a coward was jist pizen, an' a spindlin' feller had to stay in the setlemints. The clearin's hadn't no use fur him. Tom was strong, an' he wasn't lazy nor afeerd o' nothing, but he was kind o' shifless — couldn't git nothin' ahead, an didn't

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profane swearing, but the name of Thomas Lincoln never appears among the accused. . . . There is no evidence that he found it necessary to borrow money during this period. . . . That he had ready money to purchase two farms we are positive, and that he lent money to those with whom he worked we have evidence." From Louis Austin Warren: *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood* (New York: The Century Company; 1926).

keer putickalar. Lots o' them kind o' fellers in arly days. Druther hunt and fish."

Thomas Lincoln lived between two worlds, the world of the outmost settlements and the world of unbroken forest, the world of the clearings and the world of the good rifle shot who could bring in in one day, if he chose, enough game to last a large family for more than a month. He planted and tended his corn after a fashion, but he eagerly sought and brought back to his cabin venison, wild turkey, wild pigeon, and other game and fish in great variety. He was proficient with the plow, the hoe, the ax, saw, and hammer; but the rifle barrel was his favorite tool. In considering Thomas Lincoln's predilection for what we call sport, let us recollect that hunting and fishing then were one of the most important means of providing food for a family. Let us recall also that the skins of his quarry were better currency in the backwoods than most of the paper money that circulated there. The word "buck," which survives today in common speech as a denomination of currency, had a definitely pecuniary meaning and value then. Thomas Lincoln's long rifle brought him in year after year a great many buckskins.

A farm laborer and carpenter in his boyhood and youth, and a steady worker around the settlements (as written records show), for his own good, bad, or indifferent reasons Thomas Lincoln became a backwoods hunter and farmer shortly before the birth of his great son. Abraham Lincoln resembled his father closely in so many ways that one wonders why romantic doubts have often been raised about his paternity. Certainly these doubts are an element of the Lincoln legend for which little or no foundation can be found in reality. The son, like the father, did not love hard manual work, capable as both were in its performance. Abraham Lincoln would drop work like a hot

coal if a chance came to gossip and tell tall tales. But Abraham Lincoln resembled his backwoods father most of all in his great amiability, in an inveterate tendency to procrastination, and in a lifelong indifference to the amenities, etiquettes, and protocols of what is called civilized society. These traits and many another, physical and psychological, we have not the slightest doubt were honestly come by when Abraham Lincoln was born at the Sinking Spring farm in 1809. To this poor soil on the edge of the Kentucky Barrens Thomas Lincoln had removed from Elizabethtown just in time to make his son still another native of an American farm who would become President of the United States.

For nearly twenty-two years this inherent genius, born and swaddled and nursed before a log fire in a log hut in Kentucky midwinter, would know no other life than that of the backwoods farm. His memories of this rustic poverty were not in the least idyllic. Nevertheless, he enjoyed almost unbroken good health and grew to huge physical, high moral, and tall and broad mental stature, educating himself from early childhood in the basic realities of life and human nature — and also in letters, to such an extent that he became a master of English prose. The social life of the small, isolated communities he dwelt in, meager and coarse as it was, taught him the ways of the world. With such a background he became one of the greatest masters of man the political animal. Who can doubt that the very meagerness of his rustic life in all these respects constituted a strong, lean diet that nourished ideally his inborn talents? The poor acres where he first saw the light and the more favorable soil of Knob Creek and Little Pigeon Creek were indeed model farms, humanly speaking.

The Sinking Spring farm contained about three hundred acres of indifferent soil bordering the Kentucky Bar-

rens.<sup>5</sup> Little specifically is known about Thomas Lincoln's cultivation of these acres and his domestic economy there. An old man's memories have it that the Lincolns possessed a cow and a calf, a loom and a spinning wheel, plenty of pots to cook in, a good feather bed, and some buffalo robes. "Tom Lincoln was a man and took care of his wife," this ancient added tersely to the inventory. Public records show that Thomas Lincoln had horses and that he eventually lost the Sinking Spring farm because he failed to pay off a lien on the place. They reveal little else. It is not definitely known, even, how long Thomas lived at this birthplace of Abraham Lincoln, but it is conjectured that he farmed it for two or three years. The type of farm he had at Sinking Spring, however, is very well known. Although on the edge of a prairie, it was the oldest type in American agriculture — the woodland farm, the rude estate carved out of the forest. It repeated and recapitulated the medieval agricultural experience of northern and western Europe — not so remote then. For not many generations previously all men in England and on the Continent had dwelt in clearings of a great forest.

The woodland farm had many advantages peculiar to its situation. It was relatively easy to build a dwelling

<sup>5</sup> "This section, seventy miles long and sixty miles broad, was made treeless from long-continued successive fires started by the Indians for the purpose of opening a place where the buffalo could graze. It contained many subterranean caverns and springs similar to that hard by the Lincoln cabin, but not so picturesque, and was barren of other vegetation than the tall grass and a scattering of small trees along the infrequent streams. Few people then lived in the region." From Albert J. Beveridge: *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; 1928), 4. These barrens were, as a matter of fact, prairies, and not greatly dissimilar to the Illinois prairie on whose edge Thomas Lincoln would make his last homestead. Prairie land was not considered fertile until the later days of American pioneering. The fact that it did not grow timber condemned it in the eyes of the earlier pioneer farmer. At Sinking Spring, it is highly improbable that Thomas Lincoln attempted to farm actually in the Barrens, which was then considered literally barren ground. There was alluvial soil near-by.

there with the material immediately at hand. Timber also was at hand for bridges, fences, barns, and pens. This availability explains why such excellent lumber went into barn construction, even into worm fences. The woods also furnished acorns for swine, nuts for the farm family, and material for subsidiary home industries, such as the making of ax-handles and of pot and pearl ashes. Certainly the forest was invaluable, although fires there could bring disaster. The forest increased the sense of remoteness and isolation, so distressing to the gregarious that whole families would sometimes walk miles to hear the voices and see the faces of their fellow human beings. "The romantic appeal of an untouched forest," as N. S. B. Gras reminds us in his history of world agriculture, "gradually gives way, as we linger on, to the feeling of human insignificance and the fear of impending disaster. The joy of the hunt is balanced by the danger of sudden attack by man or beast. And in miasmatic districts there are the dreaded ague and malaria."<sup>6</sup>

Backwoods farmers like the Lincolns reverted to hunting for much of their living, and to the gathering of food growing wild in the fields and woods: blackberries, raspberries, huckleberries, cranberries, and — most delicious of all — wild strawberries. There were also wild cherries and grapes and crab apples, not so delectable as the bumper crops of strawberries that stained high the hocks of pioneer cattle in June, but sweetened and served up, nevertheless, in very acceptable preserves. In the woods and swamps and fields were nuts and roots of many familiar or now forgotten varieties: chestnuts, hickory nuts, groundnuts.

As for game, the forest and streams abounded in it beyond belief. Flocks of wild pigeons actually darkened the

<sup>6</sup> Quoting or paraphrasing N. S. B. Gras: *A History of Agriculture in Europe and America* (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company; 1940), 338-9.

sky. Wild duck and goose were plentiful, and wild turkey and partridge were common dishes on the woodland farm table. A haunch of venison was so common that salt pork was much preferred to it. Fish in a quantity and variety inconceivable today were tossed from the farm brook into the skillet. A biographer of Abraham Lincoln has written of his early farm homes in the western clearings as "squalid camps in a howling wilderness" and, pulling out all the stops, alleges that he lived "in gripping, grinding, pinching penury and pallid poverty, amid the most squalid destitution possible to conceive," in "rough, coarse, low, ignorant and poverty-stricken surroundings." If so, he lived on a varied and ample diet such as the most luxurious metropolitan restaurants cannot offer their patrons at any price today. Cooked quite without fine culinary blandishments, Lincoln's menu had its own juices for sauce and hard work in the open air for condiment. The "destitution" of his boyhood was certainly not nutritional destitution.

As for farm products, the mainstay, of course, was Indian corn. Wheat also was grown, if only in small quantities for home consumption. Barley and oats were chiefly cattle feed. A sober biographer estimates from public records that Lincoln's father produced as much as four hundred bushels of corn the year before he left Kentucky for Indiana — not at Sinking Spring but upon more fertile soil at Knob Creek. As we have noted, Thomas Lincoln failed to pay a lien that flawed his title and vacated the Sinking Spring farm after a few years — not on account of the lien, which was small, but probably because he found the land unproductive. The next venture of Thomas Lincoln was upon the fertile bottom lands of the Knob Creek farm,<sup>7</sup> which the son briefly describes in one of his frugal

<sup>7</sup> "If there is any land in Larue County that will grow corn year after year, it is the Knob Creek bottoms. Not only will these fertile tracts pro-



autobiographical comments: "The place on Knob Creek, I remember very well. My earliest recollection is of the Knob Creek place. . . . Our farm was composed of three fields which lay in the valley surrounded by high hills and deep gorges. Sometimes when there came a big rain in the hills the water would come down the gorges and spread over the farm. The last thing I remember of doing there was one Saturday afternoon; the other boys planted the corn in what we called 'the big field' — it contained seven acres — and I dropped the pumpkin seed. I dropped two seeds every other hill and every other row. The next Sunday morning there came a big rain in the hills; it did not rain a drop in the valley, but the water, coming down through the gorges, washed ground, corn, pumpkin seeds and all clear off the field."

The Knob Creek farm, several miles from the scene of Lincoln's nativity on Nolin Creek, was oddly shaped, narrow, and sheltered. It was on rich alluvial soil, of roughly cruciform shape, and extended along the main creek and up two tributary streams rising in rugged hills. The country about it is still thinly settled. Most of the woods remain. Narrows in the hills and outcropping rock strata have retained most of the alluvial soil farmed by Thomas Lincoln. In fact this soil may very well have become even deeper and richer from later alluvial deposits. An observer writing in 1926 said that after a hundred years of cultivation it was still producing bumper crops of corn and alfalfa. This is an entirely credible statement, for, seen twenty years later by myself, it is apparently excellent farm land still. A small cabin of hewed logs — not the original Lincoln dwelling — helps imagination to picture the life lived there more than a century ago by the easy-

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duce corn and clover, but the best alfalfa crop that the writer has ever seen in Kentucky was on one of these tracts that once comprised a part of the Lincoln Knob Creek Farm." From L. A. Warren: *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood*, *supra*, 116.

going, hopeful, and cheerful Thomas Lincoln, typical backwoodsman, and his grave young wife, whose deep nature and mildness and piety have played into the hands of those who would make of her a sort of backwoods Madonna.

There is something faintly idyllic today about the site and surroundings upon which the first memories of Abraham Lincoln dwelled so briefly — and not fondly — in later life. "I can remember our life in Kentucky; the cabin, the stinted living, the sale of our possessions, and the journey with my father and mother to Southern Indiana." This reminiscence was written when Lincoln had risen high in the world, and in his domestic circle and in social life was often reminded, one way and another, that he was of lowly origin. His backwoods rearing persisted in manners, mien, presence, carriage — all of them utterly rustic, and yet utterly correct and socially effective for the man himself as well as for the great legendary figure he was to become. At Knob Creek, however stinted the living, lay the only happy valley of childhood in this tragic life. The death of his mother in Indiana, the hard chores of later boyhood and youth there, the need to justify the ways of man to God in his political life, were preluded at Knob Creek in the unquestioning and irresponsible days of childhood. Much scattered material, old wives' tales and old men's memories, compose into a picture of eternal boyish pranks, light farm labor, and surrounding family and social affection. We are shown a boy inspiring much curiosity and esteem and love because of his odd reflectiveness and precocious melancholy, and for his innate sense of justice and his marked compassion for man and beast. Many of these impressions of Lincoln at Knob Creek farm compose around the mill and the near-by rustic schoolhouse where he first lived as a social being outside the family circle. There are many recollections of

something baffling in his nature, as well as of his quick tenderness and humor. He seems to have been, among other things, a skillful buffoon. By all accounts he was a somber farm boy, but given to unaccountable outbursts of laughter and weird mischief — neither of them in the least silly, but invested rather with some deep adult irony and inborn knowingness, almost literally *satyric*. This satyr may have been some tutelary deity following him from the great oak and the dark spring at the place of his nativity. It was also undoubtedly his backwoods father, Thomas, with his quips and his coarse anecdotes and his horseplay and rural jollity. The dark side of the child's temperament received its shadows from the melancholy farm mother, brooding with evangelical piety and tenderness as she went about the monotonous routine of a frontier woman.

At Knob Creek the Lincolns lived in a cabin of the same kind that sheltered Abraham Lincoln's infancy and, later, most of his adolescence in Indiana — a one-room structure of squared logs, about eighteen by sixteen feet. It was roofed probably with shakes held down by poles and ventilated by one or two small apertures in the log walls and by the wooden or stone chimney. This carried off more heat, no doubt, than the fire sent into the single room. Interior decoration was of a standard variety for such homes: a feather bed, straw pallets, a chair or two and a table, a bright coverlid, buffalo robes, and a hearth covered with utensils of the kind vestigial today in "quaintly" renovated early American farmhouses.

A Lincoln biographer has said that Abraham Lincoln was born in the midst of the most unpromising circumstances that ever witnessed the advent of a boy into the world. However, such circumstances have nurtured scores of the greatest men America has produced — men who rose to the highest influence seemingly uninjured by

such "squalor." It remains to be seen whether contemporary hygiene and extreme physical self-indulgence will produce great men in such quantity and quality. There is a sentimentalism with regard to high material standards of living much more dangerous than the old sentiments favoring simple and rugged living and upbringing.

Let us remember in reviewing the early rural life of Abraham Lincoln that its penury was almost entirely without the stigma of urban poverty. If Lincoln's infancy, childhood, boyhood, and adolescence were lived in conditions severely deprived in many respects, they were in no way pitiable. Living the life they led at Sinking Spring or Knob Creek or Pigeon Creek, the Lincoln family's self-respect was never threatened. Hope and pride and bodily health flourished for them and for many thousands of families who lived like them. As a matter of fact, frontier people looked down with pity and scorn on the softer folk of the settlements. That "the weak perished and the cowards never set forth" from safer and more comfortable living was the shibboleth of the pioneer. And considering that a great continent was conquered by such men, women, and children, the shibboleth was no empty one. American pioneers had a pride like that of combatant troops and resembled foot-soldiers in more than a figurative way. For they went into the wilderness and shed their blood in patrol and skirmish actions. Their bivouacs were often as rude as those of infantry in actual warfare. If Lincoln looked back sadly upon his first twenty-one years in the woods, it was very likely in the fashion of the combatant who knows war only too well. But it is not for noncombatants to say that the conditions of combat or of pioneering are "squalid." In both instances there arise a courage and a heroism that make the word meaningless.

This side of the bivouac, though, it is hard to imagine more primitive shelter than the Lincolns had for winter

quarters after their removal from Knob Creek to Indiana in 1816. They lived, in fact, in an open-faced camp or lean-to of logs and poles, such as sportsmen cheerfully inhabit for a few days of summer or early autumn while hunting in the wilds. This pole shed, according to Dennis Hanks, whose family took it over after the Lincolns moved into the superior comfort of a log cabin, was not nearly as snug as an Indian wigwam. Its flooring was of leaves or pine boughs and on the southern side it was wide open to all the rigors of continental winter weather. To be sure, the cold was tempered by a great log fire heaped up night and day from the surrounding forest. The nearest spring was a mile away; the nearest school, four miles; the nearest doctor, thirty-five miles. Here indeed were isolation and hardships that would remain forever memorable to a man of the toughest physical fiber — who was, nevertheless, emotionally as sensitive as the most sheltered child of New York or Philadelphia. The death of his mother there, unattended in her last hours except for the impotent and kindly ministrations of frontier neighbors, may have taken the measure of this remote living for Lincoln in unavailing sympathy and deep grief. The boy who helped his father whipsaw boards and fashion his mother's coffin from green lumber — no rustic lout, however he may have appeared — took from this death and burial an impression of woe, mingled with hard, meager living, that nothing ever after could erase. The happier impressions of his early life would very understandably be folded away and locked up with such tragic ones, and would not be frequented in his memory when better days came.

The tract of land that Thomas Lincoln took over in Indiana at least possessed a firm title in the land office at Vincennes. It was good enough land, as land went in that district, and all around it lay the hunting that meant so much in the all but neolithic economy. Game had been

growing less plentiful in Kentucky. A huge influx of restless people from the East had been swarming in, the advance lines of pioneering moving on into Indiana and Illinois as early as 1816. A crude agriculture could still be eked out very comfortably in the Indiana woods by a man like Thomas Lincoln, who was a crack shot and found hunting ever so much more to his liking than farm labor. Dennis Hanks gives a picture of Thomas scouring the forest much of the time for the game plentiful there. The burden of farming seems to have settled more and more on the son and on a stepmother who very promptly took the mother's place. This extraordinary stepmother, who brought children of her own to the Lincoln log cabin, was one of the kindest fates of Lincoln's boyhood. He and she worked together at chores indoors and out, and in such harmony (as she lovingly testified later) that they never spoke a cross word to each other. Abraham Lincoln would not, or at least did not, hunt, and seems to have made up for this serious default in boyhood by helping his mother and then his stepmother for several years with domestic and farm chores. This brought no neighborhood aspersions on his budding manliness, for even as a boy he was a skilled axman, and as he grew in bone and muscle he became a youth to reckon on in the rough-and-tumble fighting of the district. It is a hackneyed but important episode of the Lincoln legend — and one solidly founded on fact — that late in his teens he punished handsomely in fair fight the leader of the toughest gang of rednecks of the region, the Clary boys, thus winning their esteem and allegiance.

As "Big Buck of the Lick"—so he called himself when he entered catch-as-catch-can fighting—the young Lincoln became precociously a champion of the oppressed. He was an odd adolescent who did not curse, chew, smoke, drink whisky neat, or bring home game from the

woods. But his fighting heart (when duly aroused), his skill and strength and endurance in personal combat, were the pride of the roughest and most cynical elements of his neighborhood.

Of his farm labors in Indiana from his eighth year Lincoln himself says: "We settled in an unbroken forest, and the clearing away of surplus wood was the great task ahead. I, though very young, was large of my age, and had an ax put into my hands at once; and from that till my twenty-third year I was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument — less, of course, in plowing and harvest seasons." By all accounts, when he got his first growth Lincoln could sink an ax deeper and strike a heavier blow than most stalwart men.

At times Lincoln helped his father with the odd-job carpentering that Thomas Lincoln did for himself or for neighbors; but this lighter work, like the paternal foraging with a rifle in woods and fields, seems not to have been at all to his liking. Not that he liked the heavy labor of clearing and planting, but he was readier to give the devil of hard labor his due with the ax and the plow, saving the patience and the finesse that might have gone into more skilled labor and hunting for book learning, God save the mark!

Lincoln's father could not spare this stout helper for more than the most rudimentary schooling. Thomas Lincoln, moreover, looked upon learning as a serious waste of time and energy. So Abraham Lincoln had altogether, by his own reckoning, hardly a year of formal education — so to call the often interrupted twelve months that he sat on benches of log schoolhouses in Kentucky and Indiana. But almost every moment of leisure he was accorded or which he borrowed or stole from the labors of pioneer farming, he eagerly, almost fanatically gave to the few books of his own log cabin library, or to others that he

smelt out in the neighborhood. He wrote and ciphered on any substance that would receive the mark of his rude letters and numbers. Wonder of wonders, at the behest of budding adolescent creative faculty and his constitutional melancholy, this backwoods plowboy composed verse, such as:

*Time what an empty vapor tis  
And days how swift they are  
Swift as an Indian arrow  
Fly on like a shooting star. . . .*

He composed also a crude satire on neighbors who had won his dislike and finally — a rare thing for Lincoln — his hatred. It was a doggerel satire on the Grigsbys, into whose family his elder sister married, dying in childbed and, as he seems to have believed, of neglect. He sketched the plan of a romantic novel with a fantastic theme, reminiscent of Nathaniel Hawthorne. He wrote speeches and delivered them from a stump in the clearing to thin air or to a group of playmates. Poetry, prose, and eloquence came to him naturally, and he labored long and lovingly with words. Also naturally to him came the skill of the raconteur — broad, bawdy humor often winning for him, with his great narrative skill, the applause of the whole neighborhood, young and old. He was a first-rate artist in fable from childhood, a shrewd rustic moralist, tenderly and gravely a poet, and a born orator, whose rhetoric was as plain and as subtle and as moving as any in English speech. How could he guess, this back-country farm boy, that one day Webster and Clay, idols of his early days, would with their florid neo-classic diction be relegated to a place well beneath him in the history of American eloquence, or that one day he would deliver the greatest speech ever made in America?

All the while, as he went about his field labors, so heavy



and monotonous, or indulged his satirical humor, or put the touchstone of great literature — Shakespere, King James's Version, Æsop or Swift or Bunyan — to his innate gifts, he was no doubt deeply and secretly aware of great talents and of an extraordinary destiny. His boyhood at Gentryville, Indiana, was big with the man who would become the greatest in all American history.

The forest was fast going down, the corn that would nourish a great people and a great nation was springing abundantly from rich new soil, and the folk were increasing swiftly upon it and groping their way into a huge sovereignty. Who could tell that these strong hands and this wistful mind fumbling worn books in a smoky cabin would at last give effective shape and unity to these callow popular institutions and make them, so inchoate then, and so riven, into a great living whole? The neighbors saw only a good-natured, lazy, whimsical boy who wasted much of his time over books — without getting high-and-mighty, to be sure, but to what serviceable end in a pioneer community where food, shelter, and clothing came hard and commanded all the energies and all the hours of daylight the year round? It was in books, nevertheless, that this boy was getting by far his most important nutriment; and in them he was becoming aware of a world wider and richer than Gentryville. What he read in the few classic texts available to him, he well fermented and assimilated to his gifts; and his mind and spirit and his great body grew as fast as midsummer corn in the virgin soil of Indiana.

As for the farm that nurtured this singular boy to such stature, it was only fair-to-middling in soil and surely not too energetically cultivated. According to the voluble Dennis Hanks, after eight years of farming it contained only ten acres of corn, about five acres of wheat, two acres of oats, and one of meadow. "We Raised Sheep and

Cattle," said Hanks, "But they Did not fecth [sic] Much Cows and Calves was onely worth 6 Dollars Corn 10 cts wheat 25 at that time." There was an ample kitchen garden, of course.

After his second marriage, Thomas Lincoln's cabin housed eight persons — three adults and five children. How they were fed and clothed out of the agriculture and animal husbandry Hanks describes, it would be hard to say. In winter the Lincolns were often reduced to eating venison "hams" and smoked turkey. The men and boys were clad in deerskin trousers and jackets and coonskin caps, the women and girls in linsey-woolsey woven from wool and flax grown on the farm. There was plenty of whisky from stills that sprang up with the first crop of corn — drunk moderately and discreetly by the women-folk (just a mild tincture with spring water) but in much too frequent and liberal doses by the men. Dennis Hanks sums up the farm and domestic economy of Thomas Lincoln, saying: "Jest Raised a Nuff for his own use," adding that he "Bought his Shugar and Coffee and Such Like."

Such conditions were monotonously usual among those who kept on the front line of the frontier. And there seems to have been contrariety in the natures who chose to live at these jumping-off places, for when hard conditions were ameliorated they moved on into unclaimed forest or prairie. The outposts of frontiering were manned by people of peculiar temperaments, whose behavior certainly cannot be explained in economic terms. It was almost as if the nomadry which peopled Europe from the East had vestigially survived in some American families and, given opportunity, begun to function again in the wilds of North America. Some men, like Thomas Lincoln, had to be on the move at all costs. Certainly this had been true of his branch of the family since Hingham and Scituate. Down the long corridor of the Shenandoah Valley and

over the mountains into Kentucky, on to the Indiana shore of the Ohio, they had made their saltatorial way. All along the course of their migrations, settled ways had been elected and learned by some of the Lincolns. The Lincoln name is common today in Hingham, Massachusetts. The family left hardly a trace of their eighteenth-century sojourn in Monmouth County, New Jersey, but their name lodged and prospered in Pennsylvania and the Shenandoah Valley. Thomas Lincoln's brothers were domesticated to Kentucky. But the itch to move on was by no means allayed in the father of Abraham Lincoln, who abandoned his Indiana claims and continued the march to the wooded edge of the Illinois prairie. Here his son helped him once more to clear and to fence a woodland farm, the fourth that Thomas Lincoln had hewed out of the forest. For Abraham Lincoln this labor was his last service on the frontier. It was here, where the woodland farmer was about to come out on the prairie and the great plains, that Abraham Lincoln quit farming forever and began his apprenticeship to store-keeping, to petty politics, and the law.

Lincoln's education for a great career had been, up to this point, as purely rustic as can be imagined. To recapitulate it: his first infant steps were tried on the rough floor of a log cabin. In this same primitive shelter his rudimentary education was given him, or snatched by himself from farm labor. At six he was fetching wood and water to the cabin, at seven wielding an ax. His teens were spent grubbing and hoeing and plowing and getting in the small harvests of a pioneer farm. His family and social life were peopled wholly by rustics, many of them barefooted and illiterate. But among these rustics his sound social education went on continually. "We learned by sight, scent and hearing," Dennis Hanks said of this rude curriculum in the ways of men. "We heard all that was said and talked

over the questions heard, wore them slick, greasy and threadbare." The recalcitrance of material things, of nature and farm animals, and the devious ways of human nature, which on the farm exhibits traits (high and low) less easily visible in dense populations — his observing and dealing with such fundamentals entered most powerfully into the discipline and education of this great man. The very frugality of his experience and his own intense concentration upon its few personalities and petty events made of his rustic schooling an education quite without waste or lost motion.

The woods and corn patches of middle America gave us our greatest son.



## IX

### THEODORE ROOSEVELT: RANCHER AND COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

Mrs. Corinne Roosevelt Robinson, when she was gathering material for her reminiscences of her brother, found among her papers a copy of Swinburne's "A Forsaken Garden" in Theodore Roosevelt's handwriting. She remembered that he had sent it to her from a camp in the Maine woods in the summer of 1876. The poem had been copied in red ink. When he returned to Oyster Bay that summer, this exquisite Harvard undergraduate with his wavy red hair and Dundreary side-whiskers, this aggressive lightweight boxer who took Swinburne into a rough camp in Maine, this "Teedie" Roosevelt, as he had been known from childhood in the family circle, would row Connie (Mrs. Robinson) by moonlight to Cooper's Bluff across the Bay. There they climbed the sandy bulwark not far from the site of Sagamore Hill, and Teedie, with a "tilting swing in . . . his voice which matched the rhythm of the words," recited:

*In a coign of the cliff between lowland and highland,  
By the sea-down's edge between windward and lee,*

*Walled round with rocks as an inland island,  
The ghost of a garden fronts the sea.  
A girdle of brushwood and thorn encloses  
The steep square slope of the blossomless bed  
Where the weeds that grew green from the graves of its  
    roses  
Now lie dead.*

It is all very lush, very romantic, is it not? — the mid-summer moonlight on the Bay, the charming and adoring adolescent sister, the elegizing verse of the decadent poet who nevertheless was so ardent, so vehement, so shocking to Victorian conventions? It recalls those summer nights in Virginia when the youthful Jefferson and his sister sang together on the banks of the Rivanna to the accompaniment of his violin. These two poetic, rather sentimental young men literally mooning around by summer waters were both of them under the spell of a *genius loci*, the ancients would have said. It was a spell that led them to the sites where they would live most of their days, where married life would be founded and children born and retirement would solace and death would arrive in good time — to the future sites of Monticello and Sagamore Hill.

The Roosevelt family had summered for two generations at Oyster Bay. It remained, in the boyhood of Theodore Roosevelt, an open country of farmers and fishermen. It was, in fact, then a region from which New York drew much of its milk supply. The old general farming of Walt Whitman's childhood fifty years before at near-by West Hills had changed to the highly specialized agriculture that sooner or later begins on the edge of a city. However, the foreshadowing of the great estates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was only faintly observable in such summerings at Oyster Bay as the well-

to-do Roosevelts enjoyed in Theodore Roosevelt's childhood. Sagamore Hill, not far from the scene of Teedie Roosevelt's chanting of Swinburne by moonlight, was still a small wooded height over the Bay quite without the herd of white elephants that would eventually make the region of Oyster Bay and Glen Cove a rival of Newport and Bar Harbor. Even in 1884, when the fashionable firm of Rich and Lorenzo designed Theodore Roosevelt's "Kensington Queen Anne" summer home there and saw to its building in the midst of a wheat field, Oyster Bay was surrounded by farms and by farmers and fishermen. The Roosevelts had had no part in settling this region. For six generations they had been merchants on the island of Manhattan. They had appeared here first in Theodore Roosevelt's grandfather's day as "summer people" disporting themselves for a few weeks or months in boating and swimming, or in horse-drawn vehicles or in the saddle.

Sagamore Hill was not a seriously farmed estate like Theodore Roosevelt's distant cousin's at Hyde Park, where crops were extensively grown and animal breeding engaged in. At Sagamore Hill, to be sure, crops were grown and animals bred, but the emphasis there was strongly upon recreational family life in the open air. At Sagamore Hill Theodore Roosevelt was never a serious agriculturist, as he was for a short while in Dakota Territory before he seated himself at Oyster Bay. Sagamore Hill was the outdoor nursery of children who, Roosevelt hoped, would never have to struggle for health as he had struggled in a town-house gymnasium. He had literally struggled for breath as he was driven at night in a carriage through New York city streets during an attack of asthma. "The country is the place for children," he states in his autobiography, "and if not the country, a city small enough so that one can get out into the country." In his

own childhood, there had been summerings in New Jersey, in the Catskills, at Barrytown up the Hudson, at Riverdale-on-Hudson, in the Maine woods and the Adirondacks, and at Oyster Bay. But he never sufficiently outdistanced his asthma until at last a life in the saddle in Dakota gave him a clean bill of health — and, above it, a great surplus of physical energy and moral vigor. Small wonder that the only great American president to have been born in a great city became in time one of the most enthusiastic propagandists of the country and of the farm family in American history.

The Roosevelt family life was certainly lived out of doors and en masse at Sagamore Hill. From various family reminiscences one gets a decidedly kinetic picture of a very loosely organized guerrilla force, sometimes mounted and riding like irregular cavalry, sometimes setting forth in a flotilla of rowboats for a picnic across the Bay. Often the demiurgic father led them on one of his famous cross-country raids, from point to point through brush, swamp, up hill and down dale — and woe unto the male child who evaded a hard obstacle. From gun room in attic to cellar, the big bastard-Queen Anne house seems to have been a jolly barracks, with creative activity or pure devilment going on at all times nearly everywhere in it. The only exceptions were the dormant eight or ten hours between the going-to-bed pillow fight and the clamorous morning assembly for bacon and eggs — when freshly bathed and crisply and cleanly clothed another day commenced, only to end again in tattered garments covered with fish scales, sand, and mud. The Roosevelt boys foregathered with sisters and visiting cousins at the cow shed to drink warm milk from silver mugs. Pets in the greatest variety ran with them helter-skelter or were visited in their kennels, stalls, cages, hutches, and holes. The house itself swarmed with dogs — terriers, collies, Chesapeakes, and several



much-loved mongrels. There were guinea-pigs, rabbits, turtles, toads, a bear, and a badger. A mountain lion and an eagle could not be domesticated and had to be sent away (with a typically unamiable badger) to the zoo. But the bear was fairly tractable and went for walks with the family. A blue macaw, named Eli in honor of Yale, was sometimes allowed to wander over the table when dinner was finished. All other birds and animals likewise were named, down to the last chicken and guinea-pig. A pair of the latter were named for Bishop Doane and his wife — their first offspring receiving the name "Prodigal Son."

There had never been any question of the children's being served separately in a nursery dining-room unless a formal dinner-party for adults was planned. Supper was served at a very early hour to suit the bedtime of the youngest child. On their communal walks (as distinguished from the point-to-point raids through the countryside) all went along, the mother walking serenely and evenly ahead "while the dogs and children played around her like a school of porpoises around a ship. Every moment some treasure was discovered — perhaps a turtle, perhaps the broken end of a rusty shovel."<sup>1</sup>

En masse they played hide-and-seek in the barn, a weathered old oak-framed building which had stood on Sagamore Hill time out of mind. The twenty-sixth President of the United States himself scrambled in and out of the hayloft. The stable was another great pleasure resort for the children, "a disjointed, rambling building full of musty corners and promising mysteries. Old harness, saddles, eel-spears, and a hundred other oddments" were piled under the eaves. The stable, *qua* horses, also was oddly assorted. It contained everything from antiquated polo ponies to a piebald Shetland stallion with a bad tem-

<sup>1</sup> From Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.: *All in the Family* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons; 1929), 86.

per. When these animals were mustered in for a ride "father had a solid, confidential hunter with a cob-like build and a mouth that made iron seem pliable. Mother had a mare. The rest of us," Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. recalled, "used anything we could put a saddle on. Archie usually brought up the tail of the procession on a Shetland."

Although they lived close to the sacred-precincts of the Seawanhaka Yacht Club, none of the family save Archie went in for sailing. The Roosevelt navy was merely a fleet of rowboats of various sizes and none too well-kempt, but exceedingly serviceable for fishing, duck-shooting, and picnicking. In ragged trousers, barefoot, or shod merely in old sneakers, much of the summer the boys were on the water in these small boats. They were almost as ubiquitous, active, and predatory on the Bay in summertime as the gulls or the wild ducks in season. Turned over on a beach, these boats furnished shelter for the night on many camping expeditions.

This joyous indoor and outdoor life at Sagamore Hill, in the days when the Roosevelt children were growing up, was singularly free of the snobbish pretensions that were budding and blooming in the Oyster Bay district at the turn of the century. The Roosevelts were deeply aware of other excellences and distinctions than wealth and social position, to which after all they were long habituated. "They had brains," as the saying went in those days, and enjoyed a more or less philosophic detachment from rigorous worldliness through being conversant with the world of the mind and the spirit.

It is impossible to read long in the reminiscences of Theodore Roosevelt's family life at Sagamore Hill without recalling Yasnaya Polyana and the patriarchal ménage of Leo Tolstoy. The pattern of the Tolstoy's life in the country was roughly that of the middling Russian nobil-

ity, with their blooded mounts, many serfs, servants, and broad acres. But, like the Roosevelts, the Tolstoys were of that nobility which feels obliged to good works, intellectual, artistic, or moral. The young Roosevelt and the young Tolstoy evidently said to themselves, let us recklessly be done with self-indulgence and vested cynicisms. New energies were arising on old root stock at Yasnaya Polyana and Sagamore Hill.

There can be little doubt that both Tolstoy and Roosevelt invigorated themselves beyond measure in the outdoor life they instinctively turned to in the crisis of late adolescence and early manhood. Both rode the range on frontiers, consorting with more or less primitive human beings. After the Caucasus and Dakota, both had their experience of war. As amateur soldiers both acquitted themselves bravely, and both were guilty of similar serious indiscretions (from a military standpoint) when they harshly criticized their high commands. Both founded their family lives in rural situations and on the land. There the parallels end, for the modest literary talent of Theodore Roosevelt was attenuated to political eloquence and epithet and historical essays not quite of the first order. Tolstoy, soon disillusioned in political effort, became a historical novelist without rival in his time.

Theodore Roosevelt once wrote to a friend: "For reasons which I am wholly unable to explain even to myself I somehow rather shrink from having a sketch of my younger days prepared. . . ." But the explanation is immediately forthcoming — is it not? — in the ensuing comment: "I was a rather sickly, rather timid little boy, very fond of desultory reading and of natural history, and not excelling in any form of sport. Owing to my asthma I was not able to go to school, and I was nervous and self-conscious." How could the muscle and vigor and will-to-power of which Theodore Roosevelt became an embodi-

ment — at times a caricature, even — how could the man with the big stick acknowledge as antecedent this sickly Teedie Roosevelt, this poor child who gasped for breath for so many years? Even at Harvard and in the New York Assembly, when he had invigorated his body and will beyond the average, there were survivals of his enfeebled childhood in his manner and social being. He was still “a good deal of a joke,” reminiscent undergraduate friends and political colleagues have recalled. Something remained of the poetic boy with the overgrown mop of wavy hair and sensitive features who appears in a group photograph of a childish literary society taken in Dresden in 1873. But the shrill voice with which he sought the floor of the New York Assembly with his high, all but falsetto: “Mr. Speak-ah! Mr. Speak-ah!” turned at last to the brass of the spellbinder.

Still “a good deal of a joke” when he began the western sojourn that made him whole, this dude, this “punkinlily,” this “Mister Four-Eyes,” soon proved himself equal in vigor and courage to the toughest cattlemen and hunters. When bison charged or a wounded bear came on, young Roosevelt stood his ground, drew his bead, and stopped the enraged animal. If the sun-fishing bronco threw him down into the mud of the corral, his jaw set and he mounted again. When the saloon brawler with two guns called on this Eastern punk to set up the drinks, the brawler went down under a quick right and left. The Westerners roared with delight, discovering then and there in young Roosevelt the Jack-the-Giant-Killer who would presently be squaring off against the chartered bullies of American economic and political life — no longer an amateur lightweight, but at last a heavyweight and a world champion whose sparring was closely observed in all the chancelleries. A competent German fleet

would sail away from Venezuela under his shadow boxing.

It was the buffalo that brought Theodore Roosevelt to the Bad Lands in the autumn of 1883. Nearly exterminated in the United States and its territories by 1889, the last great herd in Dakota had been slaughtered six months before he went west to hunt straggling survivors. In the spring of 1883 huge herds had still foraged the prairies east and west of the Bad Lands. But game butchers of the frontier towns were finishing a slaughter of the bison that is one of the most atrocious follies of American frontier history. Buffalo hides were clogging every shipping point along the last stand of this fine animal. Everywhere hides stank in the sun. "Three hundred thousand buffalo, driven north from the more settled plains of western Nebraska, huddled in a territory covering not more than a hundred and fifty square miles, perished like cattle in a stockyard, almost overnight. It was one of the most stupendous and dramatic obliterations in history."<sup>2</sup> And, shall we add, an act of the kind that places human nature well beneath wild nature — a wanton, even imbecile annihilation of an animal that elsewhere, from ancient times, has been either domesticated to invaluable use, or spared in the wild state for the primitive huntsman or the sportsman.

In American history the buffalo had led the pioneer into the western wilderness over his great open trails,<sup>3</sup> through brush, woods, and prairies to his last stand in the West. He had made some of the great western clearings, notably in Kentucky, where domesticated cattle early found ample pasture. The buffalo led the way to salt licks

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Hagedorn: *Roosevelt in the Bad Lands* (New York: The Roosevelt Memorial Association; 1921), 29.

<sup>3</sup> As the cow is said to have laid out the oldest streets in New York and Boston, the buffalo laid out the trunk lines of land transportation of the United States up to the Rocky Mountains.

and clear springs, provisioned the long hunter with wild beef, and sometimes clothed him with buffalo-wool. Where the buffalo found pasture, the beef-cattle of the westering cow pens could also be nourished. It was this movement and transition, in fact, that made Theodore Roosevelt the sportsman into a cattleman in Dakota. Having, at the risk of his own life, shot one of the last bison killed in fair combat near the Little Missouri, he found himself charmed by the ranch and range life of Dakota. Most impetuously and against the best advice of his family he invested in two cattle ranches there.

Behind this hunting trip was one of the last vicious attacks of asthma of his middle twenties. It had been complicated by cholera morbus and serious frustrations in his precocious political career. The buffalo hunt hastened his convalescence, and his two ranches gave him a stake in the West. Later, when his political setbacks in the course of a year seemed to amount to something like definitive failure, he gave himself up whole-heartedly to the life of the rancher and cowpuncher. The matter was most tragically brought to a crisis by the death of his wife and his mother within twenty-four hours. Leaving ruined political fortunes and the double funeral of the two women closest to his heart, he reverted almost violently in Dakota to a way of living which, humanly and socially speaking, took him back through the ages to the pastoral existence of flocks and herds — even back of that to the life of a hunter.

In agricultural history generally the ranch is older than the woodland farm, but in America it is usually younger. "For a time, cattle had ranged over vast stretches of unclaimed land searching for grass, northward in the spring and southward in the autumn. Then the range gave way to the staked and fenced ranch, vast in extent, and, like the range, famed as the abode of the picturesque cowboy

of juvenile romance. Livestock were carefully watched and protected from wolves and thieves. The owner was generally in the business for profits. He was often an Easterner who never regarded the ranch as his permanent home. His investment was in his cattle or sheep to be shipped in large quantities to the shambles of Chicago, Omaha, or Kansas City. By prairie farmers and the American press, he was regarded as a capitalist, a member of a privileged class, the common enemy of the common man. . . . He fought a hard fight to hold his own, but finally lost in the agricultural states — last of all in Oklahoma. In other states, or sections of them, for instance in Texas, Utah, Wyoming and Montana, the ranch, of course, prevails [1940] and is deeply entrenched in climatic conditions.”<sup>4</sup>

When he invested in ranching, as a long and costly footnote to his buffalo hunt in 1883, Theodore Roosevelt promised to become a typical ranch proprietor — that is to say, an absentee owner, making occasional visits from the East to his herds and continuing the occasional hunting which had brought him to the Little Missouri. Some time before this he had begun to feel the pangs of land hunger. He had already bought his eighty acres at Oyster Bay and was building a house at Sagamore Hill. He had once been on the point of buying a large farm in the Mohawk Valley, but his kin had prevailed against what seemed to them just another rash impulse. With a Harvard classmate he had invested ten thousand dollars in a ranching venture that counted cattle by the thousands on a range north of Cheyenne. His cattle fever rose to a crisis as he threw in several thousand dollars more to stock the Chimney Butte and the Elkhorn ranches on the Little Missouri. But the chances are that he would never have become a working

<sup>4</sup> N. S. B. Gras: *A History of Agriculture* (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company; 1940), 340-1.

cattleman and rancher if outrageous fortune had not dealt his family life and his political career such staggering blows shortly after his first visit to Dakota. He took the count in the summer of 1884, but soon arose for another stiff round, and a highly successful one, with primitive living in the West.

But Theodore Roosevelt's ranch life was not *wholly* primitive. As soon as he had made himself at home in it and rebounded from political disillusion, defeat, and great grief, he sat down to one of his life's favorite avocations — writing. He had taken his part in Little Missouri roundups and proved himself a man. He had stood with aplomb the hardships of long hours in the saddle and had faced savage men and animals at bay; and his fellows had slowly discovered his adaptability and humility and readiness to fight. Plainly, and in spite of certain suggestive appearances, he was not a dude, he was not stuck up, he was not a shirker of work or danger. He was also not too sensitive to the traditional hazing of the range, and by no means anybody's fool. By the time the Elkhorn ranch house was completed he had been cordially accepted by the cattlemen and cowboys and could reserve a part of his day for the slightly dubious business of writing.

In the middle eighties Dakota Territory was in a turbulent and inchoate political development such as has usually preceded statehood. The situation was not very different from that which existed years before in Missouri, when young Thomas H. Benton had gone west after misadventures in Tennessee and, as first United States Senator from the new state, had begun a distinguished career. Did not Theodore Roosevelt's principal occupation at this time, the writing of a biography of Thomas H. Benton, reveal the endurance and resurgence in him of political ambitions that had recently been rudely thwarted in the Blaine campaign? Roosevelt had recklessly antagonized



the regular Republicans by his leadership of New York independent Republicans against Blaine's candidacy for president. His political career in the East seemed hopeless. Is it not highly probable that, while he wrote his short biography of Thomas H. Benton, he was studying a new constituency and one that finally lifted him high in restored political power? It was not specifically the potential voter of Dakota Territory who interested him, but the American voter west of the Alleghenies — generally a farmer or rancher who held a grudge against the Eastern capitalist and the political machine then dominated by the capitalist. The ward politics — so to speak — of Dakota Territory that Roosevelt studied at first hand were cynical enough in all conscience, but they were not yet quite as squalid as the routine politics of the city or state of New York. Honesty in a politician had not yet become merely effective window-dressing which the manikin-candidate learned to wear on occasion; it was actually and hopefully loved for its own sake in such communities as Little Missouri, where in everyday life a man either kept his counsel or drawled the naked truth with his hand on the holster. On the frontier a primitive honor prevailed, a kind with which Theodore Roosevelt was richly and natively endowed.

Theodore Roosevelt's first serious disenchantment with politics (because of his party's support of the plausible, very likable, but certainly venal James G. Blaine) was somewhat counteracted by his experience of the people of the Northwest — the plain people of agrarian America who even today are not entirely complacent about political corruption. "I regard my experience during those years on what was then the frontier, as the most important educational asset of all my life," Theodore Roosevelt himself said many years later. Certainly it was here in the Bad Lands that he found himself, established robust health,

and felt the first stirrings of the flood tide that would carry him into great power and great fame.

Theodore Roosevelt's retreat to primitive living on a vanishing frontier had been in many ways an idyllic pause and quite without premonition of the desperate striving that lay not far ahead of him. This retreat, oddly enough, was the strenuous life that he later preached to the world from the heights of power. It was a life strenuous more in a physical sense than a moral one. There was plenty of elemental toil, hardship, and danger, as Hermann Hagedorn points out, but there were also many hours and days of deep contentment, even of idleness and contemplation (if one can imagine such things for this demiurge). By his own confession, Theodore Roosevelt sometimes drowsed for hours on the covered porch of the Elkhorn ranch house by the Little Missouri, taking in bemusedly the cattle on the sandbars or the stir in the gray-green leaves of the cottonwoods in the least breath of air, listening to the faraway melancholy cooing of the mourning doves. Favorite books were at hand — Parkman, Irving, Hawthorne, Cooper, and Lowell; also his favored poets, Keats and Shelley and Swinburne. Often, dusty, grimy, and hot from a long day in the saddle, he read these poets in his ranch rocking-chair, indulging shamelessly his lifelong passion for English verse.

The routine of his days in the Bad Lands included breakfast at three during the roundup and dinner at eight or nine or ten in the morning, sometimes after fifty miles of breakneck riding. From ten to one, while the experts were cutting out the cows, Roosevelt was on day herd, slowly riding round and round the herd, turning back into it any cattle that attempted to escape. "In the afternoon he would 'ride circle' again over the hills; and at night, from ten to twelve, he would again be on guard," as Hermann Hagedorn relates. "After ten days or so of such

work" — it is Theodore Roosevelt himself speaking — "I would go back to the ranch to turn to my books with added zest for a fortnight. Yet even during these weeks at the ranch there was some outdoor work; for I was breaking two or three colts. . . . We rose early; each morning I stood on the low veranda, looking out under the line of murmuring, glossy-leaved cottonwoods across the shallow river, to see the sun flame above the line of bluffs opposite." He hunted and brought back game for the ranch table; returned again to his writing on Benton; mounted and rode again among the buttes. "I do not see," he wrote many years later, "how anyone could have lived more comfortably. We had buffalo robes and bear skins of our own killing. We always kept the house clean — using the word in a rather large sense. There were at least two rooms that were always warm, even in the bitterest weather. . . . Commonly the mainstay of every meal was game of our own killing, usually antelope or deer, sometimes grouse or ducks, and occasionally in the earlier days, buffalo or elk. We also had flour and bacon, sugar, salt, and canned tomatoes. . . . The ranch-house stood on the brink of a low bluff overlooking the broad, shallow bed of the Little Missouri, through which at most seasons there ran only a trickle of water, while in times of freshet it was filled brimful with the boiling, foaming, muddy torrent. There was no neighbor for ten or fifteen miles on either side of me. The river twisted down in long curves between narrow river bottoms bordered by sheer cliff walls, for the Bad Lands, a chaos of peaks, plateaus, and ridges, rose abruptly from the edges of the level, tree-clad, or alluvial meadows."

The Elkhorn ranch house "was a one-story log structure, with a covered porch on the side facing the river; a spacious house of many rooms divided by a corridor running straight through from north to south. Roosevelt's

bedroom, on the southeast corner, adjoined a large room containing a fireplace, which was to be Roosevelt's study by day and the general living-room by night. The fireplace . . . was enormous," Hermann Hagedorn says. Bachelor quarters in the earlier days, the Elkhorn ranch house became a home with the arrival of the wife and child of Roosevelt's ranch manager, Bill Sewall, and the wife of Will Dow, second in command. The women demanded certain necessities and amenities which the three men had been disregarding happily enough. Chickens they must have, and a cow. The chickens were promptly installed and generously shared with marauding wildcats. The cow was roped out of the herd and milked upside down while two men sat on her. Bread and cake were regularly baked and meals were served at regular intervals, not just now and again as in the bachelor regime. Strangely enough, the two housekeepers worked in a harmony as undisturbed as that which had prevailed among the men. The humanizing effect of having a small child — the three-year-old daughter of Mrs. Sewall — was soon felt. Theodore Roosevelt's extraordinarily strong family affections were given an immediate object in this child, whom he showered with toys and with personal attentions and endearments.

Bill Sewall, it is not too extravagant to say, had been a father to young Roosevelt. In the education of "Teedie" Roosevelt into Teddy Roosevelt, Sewall had been of the utmost influence. Privately tutored in his invalid boyhood and adolescence by various governesses and male and female teachers, some of his informal education during vacations was turned over in late adolescence to Bill Sewall, then a Maine guide who could impart to young Roosevelt not only all he needed to know about taking care of himself in the woods, but also the beginnings of worldly wisdom. (Paradoxically such wisdom is very apt

to flourish strongly among farmers and backwoodsmen, especially Yankee ones — very notably among Maine and Adirondack backwoodsmen.) Sewall, by all accounts, was as shrewd, as self-reliant, as honest, and as well-endowed with good judgment as a Maine guide of his days could be. Something of the complete trust and deep admiration that Theodore Roosevelt had given his father was transferred to Bill Sewall when the elder Roosevelt died in Theodore Roosevelt's undergraduate days. His "Dutch Uncles," as his father's brothers have been called, seem to have been well described by this epithet. They seem, that is, to have been rather too prompt and too direct in their instruction of their nephew in the ways of the world and in checking his impetuosity. With a softer hand on the reins, Bill Sewall seems to have gentled rather than broken this colt and guided him among pitfalls. As a ranch manager, Sewall may not have been supremely capable. He did not know ranching, for one thing, having been little out of the Maine woods until this adventure in the West. He did not like the Bad Lands and disbelieved in the future of the cattle business there with prophetic pessimism. He was "licked at the start," as he himself might have put it.

It has been variously estimated that Theodore Roosevelt's ranching ventures in the Little Missouri region cost him from fifty to eighty thousand dollars in lost capital and interest. But if it had been a hundred thousand, this would have been a moderate fee for the experience of men and the final establishing of health that came to him there. As an education in business it was an almost complete failure. But could Theodore Roosevelt be educated in such matters? In spite of the considerable success in business of the Roosevelt line for generations, Theodore Roosevelt seems never to have developed business acumen in the slightest degree. His estate, to be sure, amounted at last to something like three times his inher-

itance from his father, but this is believed due largely to the excellent sense of management of his second wife, acting in collaboration with members of the family who were active and successful business men.

As a business venture, very certainly, the ranching in Dakota was a signal and sizable failure. It had never been — as it had seemed to so many, but not to Bill Sewall — a really promising enterprise. An overpopulated range, drying up rapidly from over-grazing and erosion, at last became underpopulated, to say the least. A severe winter starved to death something like eighty per cent of the range cattle between November and April. From this blow the region, as range, never recovered. It went into the destined transition of fencing and dry farming. The bounty of nature had been, as usual on the American frontier, wildly and stupidly expended. First, the hunters had slaughtered the buffalo; then the cattle had been permitted to slaughter the grass; opportunely, with the grass gone, one winter had slaughtered the cattle. Came the laborious business of dirt farming and fenced grazing on a small scale for those stepchildren of the northwestern frontier, the dry farmers.

In the Bad Lands Theodore Roosevelt lost a good share of his patrimony but discovered, in their pristine form and moral condition, the American people — that tough amalgam of so many races which for the first time in our history began to crystallize into American character when the pioneers swarmed over the Appalachians. This amalgam was still molten and flowing westward when Theodore Roosevelt became a part of it for a moment on the Little Missouri. There he found himself and he found his true constituency. On this constituency, so largely agrarian, he founded his spectacular career in politics; and when the balance of political power in his time finally shifted from the range and the ranch and the plantation

and the farm and the farm market-town to urban-industrial domination, his career ended almost as abruptly as it had begun.

It was as an American soldier and frontiersman and rancher, with the candor and courage and impetuosity of such, that Theodore Roosevelt dramatized himself and appealed to the electorate, won great power, and terrified the great financiers. He was, to be sure, the merest amateur of a vanishing frontier, and ever so much less than a professional soldier; but in enthusiastically and capably acting a part on the Little Missouri and at San Juan Hill he divined the traditional spirit of an older America by no means moribund then. It was in this ruling spirit of the old agrarian Republic that he became the champion of the plain people. He had their love and trust and their blessing, the blessing they gave also to Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln, our first great leaders from over the mountains. This originally New York silk-stocking politician, carefully nursed and tutored through a semi-invalid childhood in a well-to-do bourgeois family and educated with the sons of the most privileged Americans at Harvard, recapitulated in the Bad Lands the aboriginal American experience of the pioneer farmer — of his ancestor Claes Roosevelt, if you like — tending flocks and herds, not on Manhattan Island in quiet and remote pastures near Kip's Bay, but in the enormous valley and on the vast plains of Middle America. It was there that he first got his feet on the ground. Thence he came on a broncho that carried him up heights ever so much higher than San Juan Hill. And the old American Republic, under his fierce urgency, rode along with him, hell-for-leather, and, the charge over, found itself for better or worse the American Empire.



X

CALVIN COOLIDGE: VERMONT ROCK-MAPLE

Vermont has had the great good fortune never to be affluent. It escaped almost entirely the morbid flush of opulence that came to the United States after the Civil War. Americans had been rich before but they had escaped hitherto such egregious vulgarity as swaggered in with the General Grant era. Earlier American millionaires, vulgarians that so many of them were, did not leave such portentous monuments of bad taste as those that survive from post-Civil War days. Even Vermont was not spared. The blight upon taste extended to farm cottages and the village homes of people of small means. Calvin Coolidge was born in the rear of a village general store almost as bare of amenity as a prairie farmhouse of the same period. But the hamlet it stands in is generally graced with the beauty of line and proportion that was seldom absent from American villages before the Civil War. It clusters with a becoming meekness and quiet self-respect in one of those small hollows of wooded hills so frequent in the highlands of western Massachusetts, eastern New York, and central Vermont — its few habitations speaking laconically here, in the Vermont fashion, for an American rural life that is swiftly vanishing and, perhaps, doomed.



Plymouth Notch today is quiet and remote beyond belief. In no sense a deserted village, it seems nevertheless so thinly peopled that abandonment might have gone at least half way with it. The town has not yet begun to repeople itself with city men yearning upon rural simplicity. There is little evidence of decay. The buildings are weathered, some of them unpainted, but virtually none is down-at-heel and none is yet refurbished with the cosmetics so dear to the urban beautifier of rustic homes and villages. The homespun of Plymouth Notch is still Vermont homespun; there's not a swatch of imported tweed in the whole village.

The absence of all such neo-rural self-consciousness is nowhere more striking than in the general store where Calvin Coolidge was born on the Fourth of July, 1872. In spite of all legendary insistence on the bare simplicities of Coolidge's birth and upbringing, one is unprepared for such plainness and meagerness as one finds here. There is no suggestion of meanness or poverty, but old New England frugality is most certainly enshrined here. The same may be said for the village home, near the store, where Calvin Coolidge passed his childhood and boyhood, and for the old family homestead across the fields where his grandfather lived and Coolidges had resided for generations. Is it possible that this community produced a president of the United States, that it was the scene of his taking the oath of the highest office, that it was at times the place from which the United States was governed, and that it gave the twenty-ninth president of the United States his last resting place? Was ever a village similarly honored by a native son, left in such degree untouched by vainglory? There is a strong and eloquent humility here, nowhere more impressive than at the grave of Calvin Coolidge. His remains, in fact, lie beneath such a headstone as might mark the burial place of a small-town

business man of moderate means. Out of neither Calvin Coolidge nor his Vermont village could recognition be wrung that he had risen very high indeed in the world's view and acclaim, and that his place in the history of the United States is conspicuous and secure. The tremendous forces of power and fame spent themselves upon this quiet personality and this small, remote community, leaving both apparently unruffled and unchanged.

This back-country boy with his impeccable personal code of honor, this lively and stubborn embodiment of the New England conscience, this child of a region where, in his childhood, rural virtue was unspotted from a conquering urban world, came to dominate American politics at a time when venality, juvenile cynicism, and impudence enjoyed a favorable season such as they had not known since the age of Grant. Moreover, of the zany and sophomoric and licentious 1920s this shrewd, honest, level-headed Vermonter was the idol. The village drunkard of Plymouth township may have, on the eve of a spree, entrusted his savings to the storekeeper of Plymouth Notch and gone his way in alcoholic rejoicing. So, in a sense, the American people amid the follies of the 1920s left something of their traditional honor and good sense in safe-keeping with the Plymouth Notch storekeeper's son while they rioted for nearly a decade.

Like father, like son. Calvin Coolidge's sire — storekeeper, farmer, wheelwright, politician — was the trusted custodian of his village. It is putting it mildly to say that his was a stern nature. He seems to have been sculptured out of Vermont marble. His portrait is not unlike a bust of a Roman of the Ciceronian age (though that would have been sculptured out of Carrara). The comparison is not at all fanciful. It is not fanciful to continue it into the social background of such American and Roman worthies toward the last days of their respective Republics. There

was no doubt in the first century B.C. or the late nineteenth A.D. what a countryman of the Republic should be and do. What virtue was, the rural Republican of Rome or of Vermont very well understood, and emphasis came on the *vir*: on manliness and firmness and justice and abstemiousness. This town-major of Plymouth Notch, in any case, was all of one piece and of highly refractory material. His cool, hard surface was flawless and the same material continued down to the core. Its hardness was calculated to serve a simple and single purpose: the material and moral well-being of his family. This purpose was complicated only by a comparable responsibility undertaken, at their behest, for the voters of Plymouth township. In respect to his son the elder Coolidge's will was unrelenting and harsh, to the end that the son in the fulness of time should become similarly the head of a family and perhaps a leader in his community. From earliest childhood, in manners, morals, and daily duties on the farm or in the household, the son was apprenticed to the father and was subject to scant praise and prompt blame as he prepared himself to play a man's part in the rigorous world of rural Vermont. This was a world where one rested only to recuperate strength for more labor, where one worked and saved and soberly thanked God as the distance lengthened between penury and a competence for one's old age.

Small wonder that Calvin Coolidge honored his father all the days of his life. He also kept vivid and warm in his heart till the hour of his death the image of a mother who was as mild and deeply affectionate as the father (appropriately) was not. A farmer's daughter of English, Scotch, and Welsh extraction, of the plainest rearing and very modest education, she appears in her daguerreotypes as a Victorian gentlewoman of a most engaging kind — frail, sensitive, intelligent, and authentically beautiful. It is a

very delicate beauty that she shows: brooding, reposeful, high-bred. None of the struggle and anxiety and fatigue of the Vermont farm life of her parentage and ancestry has in the least coarsened her fine grain. Here are the poise and bearing of a young woman who seemingly has led a sheltered life in the upper reaches of the middle class, but without a hint of complacency or vanity or petulant self-indulgence. Her expression is one of a sad and mild introspection, of a melancholy benignity, of visionary aspiration of some sort — as if she knew that her life would be short and could best be enjoyed in unremitting goodness of heart, quiet piety, and good works.

Her son, in his memoirs, recalls that his mother, whose place in his life is comparable in many ways to that of Lincoln's mother, "was of very light and fair complexion with a rich growth of brown hair that had a glint of gold in it. . . . There was a touch of mysticism and poetry in her nature." He remembered that she was given to contemplation. In the farmyard, behind a white picket fence and beside a mountain ash and a flowering plum tree, she planted and tended a small flower bed in late spring evenings, raptly enjoying the colors of sunset and the first large stars. As if to underscore her romantic looks and temperament, she had been named Victoria Josephine. Her death in his thirteenth year was a grief that Calvin Coolidge never outlived. He cherished it, rather, with the image of her face and personality until his own death. He recalls in his memoirs that he took the oath of office on the Bible from which she had read to him in childhood, and that later that morning he visited her marble headstone in the family plot, pausing there for a moment in solemn tribute before he left his native village for the White House. His first morning there, before he sat down to the presidential desk, he placed his mother's portrait upon it. When they opened his watch after his sudden

death they found a picture of his mother there. This impassive man, whose emotional nature, like his father's, was ever in abeyance back of its high boulder walls, nourished and tended his life long this sentiment implanted in him by his mother's love and her untimely death. Amid all the aridities of his autobiography, there are apparent only two incitements which started a flow of something like poetic expression: his recollections of the Vermont earth and of his mother, Victoria Josephine Coolidge. His attachment to both was never severed. His most human qualities and his most effective ones came honestly to him from his father, his mother, and from the land of his birth.

Calvin Coolidge once said that he had never identified himself with farming. Washington hostesses, on the other hand, well knew by trial and error that references to Vermont, and particularly to Vermont farming, were the only ones that could infallibly unlock his often boorish unresponsiveness. In spite of his memories of a boyhood of farm chores (drab for him, it seems) of filling wood-boxes, milking cows, making hay, plowing with horses or oxen, mending gates and fences, hoeing corn, and all the other monotonous work that was a boy's duty in his Vermont boyhood, the crabbedly withdrawn presidential ego would be beguiled into frugal conversational effort by invocation of Vermont rural life. The single time when the President unashamedly opened his heart in public and struck the lyre was when he — impromptu, some say — hymned the land of his birth from the observation platform of his private car at Bennington in the fall of 1928. "Vermont is a state I love," he said. "I could not look upon the peaks of Ascutney, Killington, Mansfield, and Equinox, without being moved in a way no other scene could move me. It was here that I first saw the light of day; here I received my bride, here my dead lie, pillowed on the

loving breast of our everlasting hills." These are sentiments which many a politician has employed for such occasions with a nice calculation of effect on the home constituency, and with florid eloquence. But if the speech was not quite without premeditation or rhetoric, still it has the ring of complete sincerity.

Perhaps no American president was ever more in love with a rural derivation and nurture than Calvin Coolidge. None save Lincoln, certainly, remained more uncompromisingly rustic in the presidency. The greatest agrarian president, Thomas Jefferson, and the greatest presidential champion of country life in our century, the city-born Theodore Roosevelt, seem more than a little mannered and self-conscious speaking or writing of the traditional merits of the farm and the farmer. But Calvin Coolidge — who in middle age could still feel imaginatively the spiritual and physical ache of farm chores, whose first ambition had been not to be a farmer but a country storekeeper, and whose pride was in his achievements as lawyer, politician, business man and in his bourgeois station — nevertheless remained all his life so rustic that he was, in some respects, a caricature of a Vermont farmer. Even in boyhood his schoolmates mimicked his odd rustic twang. In youth and manhood, even when President of the United States, he often garbed himself on Vermont vacations in a smock of the kind his grandfather and his grandfather's grandfather had, as a matter of custom, worn when they went about their farm labors. Accused of affectation in this, he put away this easy garment; but there was no doubt that he wore it because it *was* easy and because he felt very much at home in it — this gray smock which, until just the other day in his eastern Vermont hills, had been almost as usual as blue jeans are now. If he had had his fill of farm chores and heavy farm labor and had honorably served his time to them and gone on

to the cities and the bourgeois state, he remained in his heart the peasant who from time immemorial in New and Old England had worn this unconstricting long shirt in the barns and field labor of Anglo-Saxon husbandry.<sup>1</sup>

His biographers picture young Coolidge getting in firewood, driving cattle to and from the pastures, feeding chickens and pigs, dropping seed potatoes, driving the mowing machine and the horse rake, and pitching hay. His father, as we have said, was not exclusively a farmer, but made much of his living from country storekeeping for many years. However, there had always been innumerable farm tasks for the boy to attend to as soon as he could carry a water pail or throw corn to the chickens. He was a by no means supernumerary hand at the sugaring. In fact, as his father said in a rare complimentary mood, the boy could get more sap out of a maple tree than almost anyone else on the farm. As the season advanced, there were fences to mend, spring planting to be done, hay-making, harvesting, threshing, cutting and husking of corn, potato-digging, apple-picking, and the storing of wood for the winter. In all these activities Calvin Coolidge, as a matter of course, took his small or large part, according to his age and strength. By twelve he had learned to plow.

Schooling, in the Vermont fashion of the time, was accommodated to farm routine. It "let out" and "took in" seasonally with close regard to farm operations — upon which, after all, immediately depended most of the food, shelter, and clothing of the community. John Cotton Dana, himself of the Vermont genus and genius, once said

<sup>1</sup> "On one side of the Green Mountains farmers wore gray woolen smocks — shirtlike garments, heavy and loose and comfortable, and men said of a farmer on a village street who appeared carrying a hickory ox-goad and wearing a gray smock and woolen hat:

*He is an over the mountains man."*

From William Allen White: *A Puritan in Babylon* (New York: The Macmillan Company; 1938), 9.

that "everything in Vermont looks toward winter." No one needed to remind the inhabitants of Plymouth Notch that, if they did not literally and figuratively make hay while the sun shone, they would literally freeze or starve to death. Calvin Coolidge was early instructed in self-sustaining farm economy and put in the way of earning money outside of it. He carried apples and popcorn to town meeting and sold them at a fair profit, sawed wood at fifty cents a four-foot cord, and early felt an ambition to make money as his father did — one hundred dollars a month from the general store, net, and all of it saved year after year (the family living came from the farm). But the passion for money making — inordinate during his administration — never fevered his hard head. From childhood a healthy pecuniary instinct was at work in him. In a position to make a huge paper fortune, as President of the United States in an era of wild inflation, he played shrewdly for moderate stakes and cashed in for real money. When the winter of depression came, Calvin Coolidge had, so to speak, hay in his barn, wood in the woodbox, pork in the barrel, and corn in the crib. Early in life he had been given strongly to suspect that, in the long run, there is a connection between hard labor and a peck of potatoes, between human effort of one kind or another and real wealth. Moreover a dollar saved was a dollar earned.

On the other hand, as a boy Calvin Coolidge hunted, trapped, swam, fished, and galloped over the countryside on a calico horse. He indulged in the rustic practical joking that he never quite outgrew. He worked and played, that is, very much as his schoolmates did, if always he kept much of himself somewhat aloof, ironically observing the extreme enthusiasms of games and play. Once asked what part he took in athletics in his youth he said: "I held the stakes." He was something of a young prince



or lordling in the Plymouth community because his father was a moneyed man, worth at least twelve hundred a year, and sat in the house of peers in Montpelier. This eminence gave the boy that sense of superiority and detachment which political and economic power similarly gives to children of the ruling classes everywhere. His privileges were so unusual, indeed, that at fourteen he could continue an education that often ended at that age in Plymouth township. His father could afford at least four more years' schooling for him. With a merchantable calf in the back of the sleigh, Calvin Coolidge was driven to Ludlow, ten miles away, and entered in the Black River Academy.

"I was casting off what I thought was the drudgery of farm life symbolized by the cowhide boots and every-day clothing, which I was leaving behind, not realizing what a relief it would be to return to them in future years." Calvin Coolidge reminisces of this radical change in his life (which came shortly after his mother's death). "My whole outfit went easily into two small handbags, which lay on the straw in the back of the traverse sleigh beside the fatted calf that was starting to market. . . . I did not know that there were mental and moral atmospheres more monotonous and more contaminating than anything in the physical atmosphere of country life. No one could have made me believe that I should never be so innocent or so happy again."

"We have much speculation," he goes on to say, "over whether the city or the country is the better place to bring up boys. I am prejudiced in behalf of the country, but I should have to admit that much depends on the parents and the surrounding neighborhood. We felt the cold in winter and had many inconveniences, but we did not mind them because we supposed they were the inevitable burdens of existence.

"It would be hard to imagine better surroundings for the development of a boy than those which I had. While a wider breadth of training and knowledge could have been presented to me, there was a daily contact with many new ideas, and the mind was given sufficient opportunity to digest all that came into it."

Ah, there you have it, no doubt! The frugal intellectual fare, the narrow experience of the ways of boys and men, the few books and the fewer ideas, but a good assimilation of all these things (comparable to the same effective digesting by Abraham Lincoln in his boyhood). When Lincoln went down the Mississippi with his first cargo and when Calvin Coolidge issued from Plymouth Notch into the enlarging worlds of Ludlow, Amherst, Northampton, and Boston, both had already known the beginnings of wisdom. Such wisdom, both worldly and of a higher kind, was freely available in a rustic environment. What they had learned they had learned well. Neither went into the world a *Candide* or Prince Rasselas, with much to unlearn. Both had studied in convenient small measure the map of human society and the shape of the human heart.

Here was a boy born on "marginal" land, reared in narrow circumstances by a harsh and parsimonious father and a beautiful, affectionate, indulgent mother (lost to him at the age of puberty) — a boy who shunned, or was at least lukewarm toward competitive games, never a "good mixer" — who, nevertheless, entered the rough-and-tumble of state and national politics and rose swiftly to the topmost place in both. Let current psychiatry explain this rise of one doomed (in its books) to "maladjustment" and ineffectuality. An older school would explain it in the discarded terms of a patriarchal family life and of pertinacious hard effort and discipline, sound education

in the classics, and the old New England morale inbred for generations in the Coolidge line.

The Vermont environment, where New England moral qualities have perhaps survived most strongly and the longest, has given an extraordinarily large number of names to the dictionaries of biography and other works of reference that deal currently in reputation and fame. Twenty American cities exceed in population the whole census of Vermont, yet among the states Vermont has ranked near the top in the number of native sons who have been formally accredited with notable achievement. In a world that more and more regards luxurious plant, heavy endowment, and broad curriculum as guarantees of a royal road to learning, leadership of the most capable kind and great talent still derive in good measure from regions where population is sparse, largely engaged in agriculture, and schools and colleges do what they can for youth without palaces for residences and Caracalla's baths and the Coliseum for athletic exercise. Marginal lands still produce great men and men of genius.

Only the other day the whole state of Vermont was a wilderness. The earliest settlements of New England were more than a hundred years old when Massachusetts and Connecticut men began to straggle into this territory between the Connecticut Valley and Lake Champlain — where even the aborigines had never established themselves in any number for any great length of time. It had been a battleground of the Indians in intertribal warfare and the bloody path by which French and Indian invasions had raided New England for generations. Very thinly settled until after the American Revolution, it remained well into the nineteenth century very typically American frontier country, not unlike the trans-Appalachian frontiers of that time in Tennessee, Kentucky,

Ohio, and Indiana (states that developed much more rapidly than Vermont, leaving the latter, in a sense, an island of pioneering well back of the zone of advance of the American people moving westward).

Vermont agriculture, commencing, as a matter of course, with the self-sustaining pioneer farm in the clearings, has been quite unstable. The competition of western frontiers has forced it again and again out of hitherto profitable enterprises. For many years it was the great sheep pasture of the United States. New grazing lands of the West and the Northwest ruined this enterprise. Potash manufacture, a pioneer activity associated with forest clearing, continued as late as 1840. Potatoes were long produced for the manufacture of starch. But livestock — sheep and, later, beef cattle — was the foundation of Vermont farming for many years. As elsewhere on frontiers the cowboy and the corn-patch farmer and sheep-grazer had their day in Vermont. Even grain-growing for market was engaged in on a small scale for a time. After the Civil War sheep began to give way in Vermont pastures to the dairy cow, a change that ended in recent years with the "manufacture" of milk for Boston and New York millions. Slow to change, indefatigable, content with small, sure gains, the Vermont farmer nevertheless was forced into this high specialization, chiefly for the benefit of city consumers and distributors. The endless labor of the dairy farm offers returns per hour for a seventy-hour week which unskilled industrial labor would scorn to take. Men, women, children contribute hard, skilled effort the year round. Great risks are taken with small capital derived from savings earned in the sweat of the face. But the Vermont farmer, shrewd fellow, like the Pennsylvania German, has kept to diversification in safe measure, assuring himself at least a living on the land, and preserving underneath his high specialization in milk

products the everlasting arms of self-sustaining agriculture.<sup>2</sup>

Calvin Coolidge's father, who could turn his hand to so many things, chief among them his storekeeping, always knew where he was going with regard to life's indispensable minimum of food, clothing, fuel, and shelter. His general farm, if you like, was a kind of insurance on which he paid a fairly stiff annual premium in vigilance and hard work. He was, in a sense, a part-time farmer of a kind the world is recruiting in larger and larger numbers as urban-industrial civilization, daily becoming more complex and unwieldy and insecure, periodically casts out its millions of workers to fend for themselves or to become paupers of the state. The elder Coolidge kept close to the general farming of New England of the eighteenth century, embroidering on its stout texture the over-pattern of storekeeping and various political activities.

Calvin Coolidge's grandfather made no bones about saying that his son's turning to trade was a come-down in the world. He did all that he could to assure his grandson Calvin a life on the land — the only secure and estimable

<sup>2</sup> Vermont farming in the region of Plymouth Notch in Coolidge's youth is described by Ernest C. Carpenter in *Boyhood Days of President Calvin Coolidge* (Rutland, Vermont: The Tuttle Company; 1926), to which this essay is indebted for much detail and comment about Coolidge's boyhood and background in Vermont. Hay was the most important crop. Sheep and horses and cows were the mainstay of animal husbandry. Nearly every farm had also a few pigs and chickens and turkeys. Small spruce trees were marketed in cities of New York and New England at Christmas time. Potatoes were an important crop consumed mostly at home, but some were marketed at times. Many villages had creameries and cheese factories where milk products were processed and sold. But the dairy industry in this region was still supplementary to subsistence farming in Coolidge's childhood. Other means of making a living or eking one out were: summer boarders, sawmills, gristmills. On the whole, in Coolidge's boyhood, the Plymouth Notch region remained one of self-sustaining farms, not dependent on money economy, but dipping into it shrewdly enough for cash, seasonally and as occasion offered. Coolidge's father, who was a moneyed man and as such almost unique in the village of Plymouth Notch, nevertheless kept his farm foundation intact.

one, he believed. Hoping to keep the boy close to such verities as the family had abided by to their comfort for many generations, he deeded the grandson for life forty acres of his own farm and a mare colt and heifer calf which came of a strain bred on the grandfather's grandfather's farm. The old farmer also entailed forty acres to young Calvin's lineal descendants (all this when the boy was only six years old).

"My grandfather," Calvin Coolidge writes in his autobiography, "was a spare man over six feet tall, of a nature which caused people to confide in him, and of a character which made him a constant choice for public office. His mother and her family showed a marked trace of Indian blood. I never saw her, but he took me one time to see her sister, his very aged aunt, whom we found sitting in the chimney corner smoking a clay pipe. . . . He was an expert horseman and loved to raise colts and puppies. He kept peacocks and other gay-colored fowl and had a yard and garden filled with scarlet flowers. . . . He was fond of riding horseback and taught me to ride standing up behind him. Some of the horses he bred and sold became famous. In his mind, the only real, respectable way to get a living was from tilling the soil."

The Coolidge temper and character were decidedly of eastern Vermont, where conservatism and stability in all things had been as much a mark of human virtue as, for many years, their opposites had been in the west of the state. Eastern conservatism conquered the whole state in the long run, but much of western Vermont was at one time a veritable riot of belated French radicalism, fermenting the eighteenth-century political and theological ideas of deists and physiocrats and Rousseau's sentimentalism. The Ethan Allens of western Vermont — aided by strong liquors — kept up a wild effervescence of this kind for a generation. Generally speaking, the east-of-the-

mountains men stuck to their knitting — that is, to farming laboriously old style and cultivating political and theological conservatism and the steady habits that at last became the rule in Vermont.

The Vermont Coolidges, it seems, had ever been unregenerate Yankees, to whom the revelation of eighteenth-century liberalism or radicalism had not been vouchsafed. For generations — in Calvin Coolidge's line — they had been content to live and die away from the New England centers of population. In woolen hats, smocks, and cow-hide boots, and carrying a hickory ox-goad, they had patiently and taciturnly carried on in the age-old fashion of English peasants. From the immigrant ancestor John Coolidge, probably born near Cambridge, England, in 1604, all in Calvin Coolidge's line had farmed in New England — John, Simon, Obadiah, Josiah, John, Calvin, Calvin Galusha. But the President was several generations removed from log cabin nativity. In his boyhood few log cabins remained in Vermont, and they were decrepit and down-at-the-corners and, if used at all, housed farm animals.

His birthplace, as we have noted, was one of those unlovely rural buildings that arrived in the graceless days after the Civil War, the brattish and brawling childhood of American industrial capitalism. In Vermont villages not far distant, there are country stores erected in early Federal days whose good proportions and, sometimes, fine Adam ornament happily speak the decorous vernacular of agrarian America. But the Coolidge store is a plain, straightforward structure of two stories and attic, with its gable toward the village street, formerly bisected by a few lengths of stovepipe. A stable and storeroom flank it, and there were living quarters in the rear, with an emaciated brick flue rising above them. Meager, unhand-some, it is an example of a kind of building that housed,

in those days, so many rural inhabitants of post agrarian America.

"My parents then lived," Calvin Coolidge describes his birthplace in Plymouth Notch, "in a five room, story-and-a-half cottage attached to the post office and general store of which my father was the proprietor. . . .

"Our house was well shaded with maple trees and had a yard in front enclosed with a picket fence, in which grew a mountain ash, a plum tree and the customary purple lilac bushes. In the summertime my mother planted her flower bed there.

"Her parents, who were prosperous farmers, lived in a large house across the road, which had been built for a hotel and still has the old hall in it where public dances were held in former days. . . . On an adjoining farm, about sixty-five rods distant, lived my grandfather and grandmother Coolidge. Within view were two more collections of farm buildings, three dwelling houses with their barns, a church, a schoolhouse and a blacksmith's shop. A little out of sight dwelt the local butter tub maker and beyond him the shoemaker. . . .

"We lived there in the general store annex until 1876, when the place was bought across the road, which had about two acres of land with a house and a number of barns and a blacksmith shop. About it were a considerable number of good apple trees. . . .

"Some repairs were made inside, and black walnut furniture was brought from Boston to furnish the parlor and sitting room. It was a plain square-sided house with a long ell, to which the horse barn was soon added."

Of these three homes — the birthplace back of the country store, the house with two acres across the road from it, and the grandfather's farm across the fields — few would hesitate to say that the old unpainted family homestead of the Coolidges with its outbuildings is by far the most



prepossessing and lovable. The square, heavy brick chimney stack and the broad solidity of the dwelling centering in it, the gentle slopes immediately around it rising to a wooded height behind speak of comfort, security, sufficiency in a rural environment by no means generously productive. This old family farm, though, has surely made the best of its "marginal" soil and situation in its day. Its large, sound buildings testify that character and human effort in any farming enterprise are almost as important, perhaps, as soil and climate. This roomy house and its barns are rooted in a soil of no remarkable fertility, but humanly and socially it springs from one exceedingly rich. Here the home-keeping of the Coolidges thrived obscurely and ruggedly for generations, at last flowering very conspicuously. Calvin Coolidge, to be sure, was not born here, but his family progressed from it by easy stages to the country store, to the two-family house in Northampton, to the gubernatorial rooms in the Adams House in Boston, to the vice-presidential suite in the New Willard Hotel in Washington, and to the White House.

Let the imagination sweep all of America and take in what modern journalism so seldom invites its readers to ponder: the vast scattered populations of agricultural hinterland, still the majority, where men, women, and children hazard their fortunes and labor to produce food for the nation. There Calvin Coolidge and the character and morals and polity of his native Vermont are not merely charming quaintness to be patronized and gushed over in delicious nostalgia. They are the things men live by as indispensably as they live by the implements of their vocation. They constitute the foundation and frame of American culture, mortised and tenoned in granite. They laugh at what you call dissolution.

## EPILOGUE: NE VIRTUTES SILEANTUR

When the Romans reached the summit of political power in the Principate of Augustus, Roman "intellectuals" who had been toying for a generation or more with the pedantries of Pergamon or Alexandria, and cultivating a cynicism and *bizzarrie* imported in the days of Ptolemaic bureaucracy, began to experience a profound change of mood. The greatest Roman poet, who had commenced his career quite in tune with Hellenistic decadence, turned to the distant past of Rome and the agrarian traditions of the Republic for new inspiration and composed under imperial patronage the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics*. The Alexandrian poets continued their charming and decadent versification, but their vogue was subsiding. Virgil abandoned the meretricious shepherds of Theocritus for crude old Ennius, with his sound morality and epic strength. A great people who had conquered their world and at last established peace in it deserved greater heroes than degenerate Theocritans and such gods as the talented and trivial Ovid created in his own image.

Are not Americans in a similar position today with regard to culture and political power? Certainly they deserve better of their writers than they have been receiving for a generation or more — greater heroes than these clinical specimens of moral weakness whom the novelists have been parading before us since the early 1920s. These easy victims of all the vices (and especially of their own silliness and footlessness) have been displayed for nearly thirty years now. While such futility has been dramatized and eagerly imitated by the youth of a whole generation, our great men of colonial and early Federal days have been dissected. Whatever morbid tissue their lives were

found to contain has been held up for weaklings to carp at. The aftermaths of two wars have favored the scavengers of moral decay and whetted a morbid appetite for disillusion. Another great storm threatens, which, if it breaks, may very well cure the disease of over-civilization by reducing civilization to its roots with apocalyptic violence.

Now the roots of all civilizations — it is a daring platitude to offer a clever world — are in the family, in the land, and in the memory of great men and women whose lives have fulfilled obscurely or conspicuously or gloriously the old moral law which is the deepest root of the whole matter. For Americans the past laid a deep and fertile mould in our agrarian and republican days. In it flourished many men who rank with the greatest of all time: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Washington, Adams, Jackson, and Lincoln. Let the titterers titter and the sniggerers snigger as they must over the many imperfections of these great Americans, they are still giants; and if our relative stature gives us an excellent close view of their feet of clay, still we can, if we like, look up to them as they tower above us.

It has been the purpose of these essays to present small and great heroes of our colonial days and the days of the agrarian republic. It so happens that all of these men, in their youth at least (some of them until the last years of their lives) lived close to the roots of civilization in the family life of a farm, a plantation, or a farmed estate, and derived their culture chiefly from the classic literature of antiquity. Alas, our agrarian days are over and the humanities have been finally dismissed in this scientific millennium that blesses the world now. But the scientific millennium not only has not made human happiness and holiness triumphant, it has lately invented the means of its own destruction. Invention is the mother of

necessity, some wag has said. Science's latest invention has surely created a crying need, a dire necessity for wisdom of a kind outside the category of science — a moral wisdom that has been revealed to the great men and women of all times and places.

For Americans to look back for guidance and example to men of times past is to sound the retreat in a present combat desperate but not lost? It is courting reaction and the monstrous ills of fascism? It is nothing of the sort! It is a recommendation rather to keep our lines unbroken with the strong points of a republican America which was also agrarian, which was founded in the spirit of republican Greece and Rome — a brilliant American past in which fascism was ever struck down in its first manifestation. Fascism, as a matter of fact, is a brat begotten in the slums of urban-industrial civilization. It was unthinkable in our republican agrarian days, unless, as Jefferson warned, political power were to be seized by the cities and industry, by an urban mob led by demagogues. Obviously a decentralization of this power today and the striking of equilibrium between the people of rural regions and the town would destroy fascism in its roots — its roots in the cheap *pension*, the flophouse, the back room of the slum bar, the board room of the great industrial corporation, the secret meeting of corrupt labor leaders — wherever in fact conspiracies are laid against unorganized free men. In such places and such secret gatherings the names of the great agrarian American presidents are never invoked and the inert power of the free family farmer is either not mentioned or is spoken of with contempt. But let these conspirators beware! Their overweening power and their contentions are courting a nemesis that time and again has cleared the world of such folk, leaving only the ancient and universal husbandmen and the old moral laws to revive in a new day.

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#### A NOTE ON THE TYPE

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